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BLUE JAY

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**COVER:** Yellow-headed Blackbird

Four Winds Prairie Photography



# BLUE JAY

Vol. 43 No. 3

September 1985

143-202

TOM WHITE, 1929-1984 — REFLECTIONS *Jack MacKenzie* ..... 145

## Plants

SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF MORELS AT THE PAS, MANITOBA  
*Walter Krivda* ..... 150

## Palaeontology

A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE BRONTOTHERIIDAE COLLECTED IN  
SASKATCHEWAN *Tim Tokaryk* ..... 151

VOLUNTEERS WANTED TO PRESENT WINTER INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS .. 154

## Insects

SKIPPERS AND BUTTERFLIES OF CRIMSON LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK,  
ALBERTA. *Harold W. Pinel* ..... 155

## Birds

THE EASTERN BLUEBIRD AT DAUPHIN, MANITOBA.  
*William J. Walley and William L. Clark* ..... 160

1984 CALGARY AREA BLUEBIRD TRAIL RESULTS. *D.J. Stiles* ..... 169

COMMENTARY ON GRACKLES ANTING WITH MARIGOLD BLOSSOMS.  
*John V. Dennis* ..... 175

FIRST SAGE THRASHER SIGHTING IN MANITOBA.  
*Andrew Horn and Peter Christie* ..... 177

SIGHT RECORDS OF COMMON EIDER IN SASKATCHEWAN AND  
NORTHEASTERN MANITOBA. *Martin K. McNicholl* ..... 179

RARE BIRDS NEAR FORT QU'APPELLE, SASKATCHEWAN, 1984.  
*Ronald R. Hooper* ..... 181

WINTER AVIAN ANOMALIES, RESTON, MANITOBA. *David L. Braddell* ..... 182

ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF ASSINIBOINE PARK, WINNIPEG,  
MANITOBA. *Martin K. McNicholl* ..... 184

DO HUMMINGBIRDS FOLLOW SAPSUCKERS TO FOOD SOURCES?  
*Richard W. Knapton, Ralph V. Cartar and John D. Reynolds* ..... 186

SNHS WHOOPING CRANE TOURS - 1985 (Notice) ..... 187

EGG-BURYING BEHAVIOUR BY A YELLOW WARBLER IN THE APPARENT ABSENCE  
OF COWBIRD PARASITISM. *J. Paul Goossen* ..... 188

NORTHERN ORIOLE. <i>Jean Bancroft</i> .....	190
Junior Naturalists	
COME BACK SWIFT FOX. <i>Gillian Richardson</i> .....	192
Nature Library	
NEST BUILDING AND BIRD BEHAVIOR. Reviewed by <i>Philip S. Taylor</i> .....	194
THE BIRDWATCHER'S COMPANION. Reviewed by <i>C. Stuart Houston</i> .....	194
THE WORLD OF ROBERT BATEMAN. Announcement .....	195
WILDERNESS WAYS: SASKATCHEWAN POEMS. Announcement .....	195
THE SPIRIT OF THE HUCKLEBERRY; SENSUOUSNESS IN HENRY THOREAU. Reviewed by <i>Marshall Gilliland</i> .....	195
BLACK WOLF: THE LIFE OF ERNEST THOMPSON SETON. Reviewed by <i>C. Stuart Houston</i> .....	196
THE NORTHERN NATURALIST. Reviewed by <i>Mary D. Gilliland</i> .....	197
Letters	
A TASTE FOR FOWL. <i>Joan Dalziel</i> .....	199
SHOWY LADY'S-SLIPPERS — 1943. <i>Lewis Wojciechowski</i> .....	199
NATURE NOTES FROM SOUTHEY. <i>Gertrude B. Hillier</i> .....	201
Members' Viewpoints	
A SASKATCHEWAN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY. <i>Wayne C. Harris</i> .....	202
37th ANNUAL MEETING (Notice) .....	202

# TOM WHITE—1929-1984—REFLECTIONS



*"We need the tonic of wildness. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable. We need to witness our own limits transgressed and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."* — Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Tom White needed the tonic of wildness; it took the compelling qualities of the Canadian frontier to forge the full realization of his potential. Certainly this was not unique with Tom — many other Europeans, including Grey Owl, have been captivated by

that same spirit and fascination that characterize vast areas of the North American wilderness. In particular however, it was the Saskatchewan landscape which fanned for Tom what had been no more than a cursory interest in natural history in his native Britain. It forever changed his life; it permeated all he did.

Tom lived in Saskatchewan for 25 years. In that time he criss-crossed the province in the pursuit of his interests. While he occasionally travelled beyond its borders, it was Saskatchewan that fascinated him, to him it was sufficient and consuming. He



walked its sand-dunes and eskers, its hills and coulees, grasslands and forests. He did not simply keep pace with his companions, but marched to a "different drummer," and followed that beat wherever it led. He was a voracious reader, with an active, restless mind. His zeal and enthusiasm drew people to his projects and to him — he offered stimulation, adventure and leadership. The challenge of Saskatchewan brought immeasurable richness to the life of Tom White; in turn, when he left it, he had enriched the lives of us all through his contributions in natural history, poetry, conservation, heritage preservation and architecture. And, for many of us, he left wonderful memories.

Bird-watching held little interest for Tom. In his typically analytical way, he often pondered on just what it could be about birds that attracted so many people; his conclusion — their colors. What did captivate him was the mysterious, the wild, the inscrutable, and it was the Cougar that ignited a latent spark in Tom. His fascination with its presence in Saskatchewan (and later, also that of the grizzly) became a passion. For him it was a rare and beautiful symbol of wild nature, and for over a decade he spread a net over the province, pursuing relentlessly every trace of a report of Cougar or Cougar sign — hundreds in all. He became expert on their habits, their tracks, on the difference among wolf, Cougar and lynx tracks. The result of this research was published in book form in 1982 (*Saskatchewan Cougar — elusive cat*). Some of the reports are quoted verbatim, and not only offer insight into the nature of this animal, but also paint colorful sketches of prairie people and their environments:

"I'm interested in painting wild mushrooms and about three blocks from our home on the river bank I noticed a face of the biggest, pudgiest pussy cat and immediately ran after it. It scurried up a big poplar and snarled back — it was no house cat or lynx. It was tan, huge paws and the

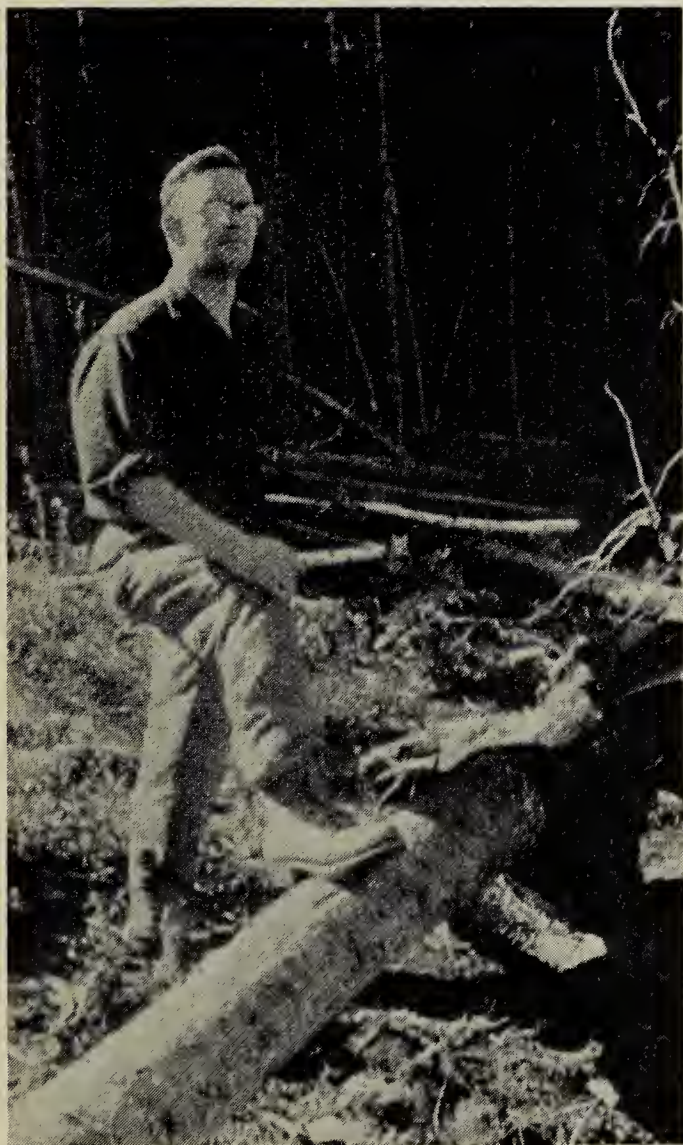
long tail could only divulge it as a cougar. Nobody believes me. I did not report this to anyone except a few birdwatchers, for the simple reason that there would have been a posse after this young, regal animal — and I hate people destroying animals." (*Saskatchewan Cougar — elusive cat*, p. 67).

The search for the Cougar led him to the vast and inaccessible Pasquia Hills, and eventually to the hypothesis that besides Cougar, there might possibly still be remnants of the Great Plains Grizzly in this rugged forest. Henry Kelsey had sighted grizzly in the area in 1690, and Tom had heard recent Cree stories of "big bear up in the Hills." Thus the Pasquias gradually became the chief focus for his research, and increasingly exercised their magnetism upon him. They epitomized the wilderness, and again and again he returned, not just for Cougar and grizzly, but to explore the Hills themselves.

The problem of establishing conclusively a current presence of the grizzly in Saskatchewan proved a much more difficult task than for the Cougar. Tom's search, however, did turn up evidence, old and new, of huge bears, and this evidence, including photos and claws, was shared with recognized bear experts in both the United States and Canada. The giant Veillardville bear, shot in the Pasquias in 1939 was "almost certainly a grizzly" according to Dr. Phillip Youngman, Curator of Mammals in the National Museum in Ottawa. Frank Craighead, an Idaho expert, in personal correspondence with Tom in 1971, stated that pictures of both a bear killed in 1954 and the Veillardville bear "look like grizzlies." Tom gradually became convinced the only definitive proof of grizzly bear in Saskatchewan would be the securing of a skull. This led to repeated digs to try to recover the skull of the buried Veillardville bear. Tom's investigations and conclusions on the grizzly have been recorded in an unpublished manuscript entitled "The grizzlies of Saskatchewan."



It was during his research that Tom organized his famous Pasquia Hills expeditions of the 1960's and early 1970's, pushing for the heart of the Hills from every direction — up the Rice River and Bainbridge Canyons on the north, from the Fir River and Greenbush Trail on the south, the Man River on the west, the Pasquia and Chemong rivers on the east. No one who accompanied him on these hard-driving treks will ever forget them — back-packing by map and compass through muskeg and black spruce, along poplar ridges and game trails, through a wilderness forest, wild and beautiful. He was not a skilled woodsman, but it was he who carried the vision, supplied the zeal — the acknowledged leader.



*Tom White*

On several occasions he reached the central summit, the most inaccessible part of the Hills — Wildcat Hill.

Tom believed fervently in the value of wilderness to man — we need the wild remote places now more than ever. Roads should not be built to all these areas, some should remain relatively inaccessible, not capable of being reached by everyone. They symbolize the “tops of the mountains,” shrouded in mist. Though very few ever achieve the summit, we need to know that these wild places exist, that the shadowy Cougar still prowls the canyons, that there just may be grizzlies lurking in the forest. Thus was born Tom's idea of having the core area of the Hills preserved for all time and for all people. Through his vision the Wildcat Hill Wilderness Area was established, the first of its kind in the province. In this process he was not a loner, but worked cooperatively with all who were willing and able to help — friends, societies and government.

A lake just north of Wildcat Hill was named White Lake in honor of his efforts in preserving wilderness areas. He reached the Lake on a memorable occasion after it was named. He had packed across the Hills by map and compass, heading for the lake; dusk had arrived on the second day — still no lake. A rude camp was made, with a hole in the nearby muskeg providing water. Next morning during breakfast it came — the call of a loon, directly ahead. Cheers broke the silence — that had to be the lake! After walking less than a quarter mile, Tom stood on the shore of White Lake, a moment of tremendous exhilaration. In 1974, Tom was instrumental in having the Kelsey Trail (between Nipawin and The Pas) dedicated with grizzly bear silhouettes commemorating the first white explorer to observe and describe the grizzly bear in North America.

Tom's values and aesthetic qualities were distilled and preserved in his poetry. With great imagery he captured the craft and power of the Cougar, the beauty and fragrance of the prairie, and man's tragic alienation from nature. His poems were published just before his death in a booklet, “Wilderness Ways.”

Tom led through action and example. His life and his values remain for us a stimulus and a challenge. He demonstrated vividly the contribution that the amateur can make in research and conservation. He has reminded us forcefully that the priceless natural heritage that is Saskatchewan is already being eroded. His involvement in natural history followed a sequential pattern, beginning with his initial personal interest, developing through his travels and research, and reaching a permanent consolidation for the benefit of future generations in his writing, his conservation efforts and his poetry. His vision and concern are evergreen; they are still leading us.

*"We need an enrichment other than material prosperity, and to gain it we have only to look around at what our own country has to offer. ... We have something here that no other country has."* — Grey Owl

Tom White was born in Wales and grew up in both England and Wales. In 1959, with his wife Pamela, he came to Regina to practise his profession as an architect. He was a member of both the Regina and Saskatchewan Natural History Societies, becoming president of the Regina Society in 1965, and serving as chairman of the Conservation Committee of the Saskatchewan Society in 1973.

He was the founding chairman of Heritage Regina in 1977, served on the Saskatchewan Heritage Advisory Board from 1977 to 1979, and was Regina Branch chairman of the Community Planning Association of Canada in 1975-76. He helped restore Stanley Mission on the Churchill River, the oldest building in the province.

Tom served on the first Board of the Regina Native Friendship Centre, planned Huston Heights, a residence for the handicapped, and as a Rotary Club member, planned the shipping of tons of old Regina school textbooks to Jamaica. In 1984 he

won a municipal heritage award for preserving the heritage character and economic viability of the Regina Transit Centre on 11th Avenue.

In 1984, he was awarded a life membership in the Saskatchewan Association of Architects in recognition of his contribution to the cultural heritage of the province.

Tom is survived by his wife Pamela, his son Eddie, and his daughter Wendy.

*How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!*  
— Tennyson, *Ulysses*

— JACK MacKENZIE, 56 Fines Drive, Regina  
Saskatchewan. S4N 5K5



## THE COUGAR

By: Tom White

Cougar prowls the silent night,  
With orbs that glow with hidden light.  
She stalks the winding, lonely trails,  
Where grey wolf howls and lone loon wails.

Green-eyed phantom on padded paws,  
With feline stealth and hidden claws,  
Mysterious beast with tawny hide,  
Her muscles rippling through her side.

Silently through hill and creek,  
While searching for her evening meat,  
To feed her kits and have her fill,  
And cull the herds as nature willed.

The tired or old, the weak and sick,  
Diseased or wounded, gnawed by ticks,  
The injured, lame or starving deer,  
And those that doze and do not hear.

The smaller game that aren't so sharp,  
Who do not listen in the dark,  
Who do not sense a stealthy tread,  
When all the forest's still and dead.

Cougar prowling in the night,  
With orbs that glow with hidden light.  
She stalks the winding lonely trails,  
Where grey wolf howls and lone loon wails.

*White Lake in the Pasquia Hills*



# SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF MORELS AT THE PAS, MANITOBA

WALTER KRIVDA, Box 864, The Pas, Manitoba. R9A 1K8

The morel is famous in Europe as a table delicacy. In The Pas it has been picked by Ukrainian people since the 1920's. A gourmet friend pronounces it the best of all mushrooms. In Paris, France six morels cooked in their own juice and laid on a plate command a price of \$30.00. At The Pas for many years we have picked them by the shopping bag full. Indeed it is rumoured that some 30 shopping bags full were picked from a particular area by ten people last May and early June. They occurred in poplar and willow woods — with most poplars of the diameter of a man's wrist. The leaves were just greening on the trees producing the effect of filtered light. They grew abundantly averaging 6 to the square meter over a 4 acre area. This year not a single morel was to be found where

formerly they were in arrayed thousands. At least three distinct species were present. It has been suggested that the sudden onset of winter in early fall last year failed to allow the morel mycelium to develop and mature to overwinter properly. It would be valuable and interesting to observe this in future years — if in fact an early winter spoils the morel crop the following spring.

A student informs me that the reason why there are no morels is because we have had no spring thunder storms yet. There is a legend which states that it is thunder shaking up the ground which helps mushrooms (all kinds?) to grow! This is had on the good authority of an old woman who has picked morels for many years!



*Brome grass.*

*Chris Adam*



# A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE BRONTOTHERIIDAE COLLECTED IN SASKATCHEWAN

TIM TOKARYK, Earth Sciences, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Wascana Park, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3V7

Brontothere (Mammalia: Perissodactylia) material has been recorded from Saskatchewan since the late 1800's. This review of the literature details their discovery.

## Introduction

The progressive history of fossil vertebrate collecting in Saskatchewan can be dated back to the 1880's when R.G. McConnell and T.C. Weston collected a small sample of Tertiary fossils from the Cypress Hills area. Although the Tertiary deposits are rich in vertebrate material (Late Paleocene, Late Eocene, Early Oligocene, Middle Miocene), the Mesozoic deposits are also quite respectable (Upper Cretaceous: the terrestrial Frenchman Formation and the marine Bearpaw Formation) which gives Saskatchewan a diverse range of fossil vertebrates.

The late Eocene and Early Oligocene beds of Saskatchewan yield many vertebrate fossils such as *Cupressimus barbarae*,<sup>10</sup> a new species of rodent known only from this province, and mammals belonging to the extinct order of Multituberculata such as *Ectypodus lovei*.<sup>2 11</sup> However, of the larger vertebrates of those times, only one stands out, the brontothere.

These large herbivorous mammals (some standing 7 feet at the shoulders) roamed Saskatchewan 35-42 million years ago, browsing mostly in forest and associated plant life. The forests were important for these mammals to survive, but they may have contributed to their demise. Russell concluded "that the disappearance of the brontotheres is analogous to that of the dinosaurs, although operating on a shorter

time interval. The regional uplift that occurred in western North America at the close of Eocene time began a climatic change toward less humid, and less tropical climate, providing conditions suitable for the spread of grasslands at the expense of forests,..." where brontotheres found their food. "The brontotheres reached the end of the blind alley into which their restricted feeding habits and the changing climatic and plant environment had directed them."<sup>8</sup>

One of the most unusual anatomical aspects of brontotheres was their large horns on either side of the nasal. These varied considerably in size and shape which has contributed some confusion to the taxonomy.

## Brontotheres from Saskatchewan

E. D. Cope's description of McConnell and Weston's collection included fossil fish, reptiles and large numbers of mammals.<sup>1</sup> Cope referred most of the brontothere material to *Menodus* on the basis of partial skulls, dentaries and several postcranial elements.

Later, Lawrence Lambe, then vertebrate palaeontologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, described a collection made mostly by himself in 1904, in which he "examined the exposure of the Oligocene deposits along the eastern escarpment of the Cypress Hills. The greatest part of the collection was made in Bone Coulee and its numerous tributary coulees, and in its southern extension for a few miles along

Fairwell Creek.”<sup>3</sup> Lambe listed all of his brontothere specimens as *Megacerops*, based mostly on dental material.

In 1934, when Loris Russell was with the National Museums of Canada, he reviewed the Lower Oligocene vertebrate fauna of the Cypress Hills and identified several species of brontotheres, but modestly remarked that he had followed “the classification of Osborn, although aware that some students of this family do not accept all of the genera and species recognized by that author. However, the writer is not qualified by experience to decide in this matter, and for sake of uniformity, has used Osborn’s groups.”<sup>5</sup> The five genera that were described were *Teleodus*, *Brontops*, *Allops?*, *Menodus* and *Megacerops*, based on skulls and dental material.

When Russell reviewed the brontotheres from the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan, he cited only two genera, *Brontops* and *Megacerops*, using excellent skulls.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of brontothere skulls that were collected from the Cypress Hills area were recorded from an area called the Hunter Quarry. While collecting fossils in this area for the G.S.C. in 1936 Mr. and Mrs. Fenley Hunter of Flushing, New York and Albert Silberling of Harlowton, Montana, located a large area of fossiliferous beds. These beds have contained many fine brontothere specimens along with other mammalian remains and have been worked by several institutions including the Royal Ontario Museum, National Museums of Canada and the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History.

Even though the Hunter Quarry is considered Early Oligocene on the geological time scale, a few specimens of brontotheres have been collected from the Late Eocene of Saskatchewan. In reviews of the Eocene fauna a right P<sup>4</sup> [fourth premolar] was described as *Diplacodon* sp., a Late Eocene brontothere.<sup>9</sup> <sup>7</sup> Storer, in reviewing the same fauna with more specimens, conclud-

ed “with such poor material, I feel that even generic identification is unwarranted.”<sup>11</sup>

Spencer Lucas and Robert Schoch described a new genus of brontotheres from the Late Eocene of western North America which they called *Duchesneodus* based on lower jaws. *Duchesneodus* includes most Late Eocene species formerly referred to *Teleodus*, one of which is found in Saskatchewan.

Nearly all the material from the Tertiary beds of Saskatchewan is disarticulated. However, in 1973 the staff of S.M.N.H. collected a skeleton, 60% complete, which is a first for Canada as noted by Tillie.<sup>12</sup> This bronto is tentatively referred to as *Megacerops* (P1349.1). This skeleton consists of a complete skull (fig. 1), vertebral column (cervical and dorsal), nearly all the ribs and one complete and one semi-complete front limb. In general the specimen is missing the hind section.

The author spent a month at the Tyrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller, Alberta, gaining experience with new mounting techniques. The staff there reconstructed the missing bones of the brontothere with much patience and expertise, and an agreement was made between the two institutions that we would send the molds of the specimen to them and they would make the casts. Later, the author joined them to mount as many replicas as time allowed. Casts for four skeletons were made. Two were to stay in Drumheller and two were to come to the Museum of Natural History in Regina. However, because of the lack of space in the museum neither of the brontothere skeletons will be mounted until space is made available (one will eventually be mounted and sent to the Eastend Museum, Eastend, Saskatchewan).

## Discussion

Russell stated in 1934 that brontothere classification was somewhat in doubt; since then, more doubt has clouded the taxonomy with new specimens being





Figure 1. SMNH P1349.1, *Megacerops*?, left lateral view. Scale is equal to 10 cm. c canine tooth, h horn, m molar teeth, n nasal, o occipital, p premolar teeth, po paraoccipital, s squamosal. Illustration prepared by Fred Lahrman (SMNH).

recovered. Genera and species of brontotheres are generally defined using characteristics of the teeth and horns. Since mammalian teeth are usually diagnostic it should not be too difficult to classify brontotheres. However, the dentaries are usually very worn in adult specimens making identification sometimes impossible. Some brontotheres can however be identified by the number of incisors. Problems also arise in identifying brontotheres according to their horns since they vary enough to imply that this is the result of sexual dimorphism and/or individual variation. The skull alone cannot be the only diagnostic tool.

The Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History has over half a dozen skulls of brontotheres in its collections and displays including a small juvenile skull with budding horns. Most have come from the Hunter Quarry (Calf Creek Local Fauna) or from

Pine Cree Regional Park (Southfork Local Fauna) It is to be hoped that in the near future a better study can review this family which includes many Saskatchewan specimens.

<sup>1</sup> COPE, E.D. 1891 On vertebrata from the Tertiary and Cretaceous Rocks of the North West Territory. Contr. to Can. Palaeo., Geol. Surv. of Can., Vol. 3.

<sup>2</sup> KRISHTALKA, L., R.J. EMRY, J.E. STORER and J.F. SUTTON 1982 Oligocene multituberculates (Mammalia: Allotheria): youngest known record. J. of Paleo. 56(3):791-794.

<sup>3</sup> LAMBE, L. 1908 The Vertebrata of the Oligocene of the Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan. Contr. to Can. Palaeo. 3(4).

- <sup>4</sup> LUCAS, S.G. and R.M. SCHOCH 1982 *Duchesneodus*, a new name for some titanotheres (Perissodactyla: Brontotheriidae) from the Late Eocene of western North America. J. of Paleo. 56(4):1018-1023.
- <sup>5</sup> RUSSELL, L. 1934 Revision of the Lower Oligocene Vertebrate Fauna of the Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan. Trans. of the Roy. Can. Inst. 20:49-67, plates.
- <sup>6</sup> RUSSELL, L. 1940 Titanotheres from the Lower Oligocene Cypress Hills Formation of Saskatchewan. Trans. of the Roy. Soc. of Can. Sec. 4, 34:89-100, plates.
- <sup>7</sup> RUSSELL, L. 1965 Tertiary Mammals of Saskatchewan Part I: The Eocene Fauna. Roy. Ont. Mus., Life Sci. Contr. 67.
- <sup>8</sup> RUSSELL, L. 1973 Geological evidence on the extinction of some large terrestrial vertebrates. Can. J. Earth Sci. 10(2):140-145.
- <sup>9</sup> RUSSELL, L. and R.T. WICKENDEN D1, 1933 An Upper Eocene vertebrate fauna from Saskatchewan. Trans. of the Roy. Soc. of Can. Sec. 4, 3rd Series, 27:53-65.
- <sup>10</sup> STORER, J. 1978 Rodents of the Calf Creek Local Fauna. Nat. Hist. Contr. 1:1-54.
- <sup>11</sup> STORER, J. 1984 Mammals of the Swift Current Creek Local Fauna. Nat. Hist. Contr. 7:1-158.
- <sup>12</sup> TILLIE, R. 1973 A fossil first for Canada. Blue Jay 31(4):242-243.

## VOLUNTEERS WANTED TO PRESENT WINTER INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

The Saskatchewan Natural History Society has tentatively agreed to present five interpretive programs this winter in Saskatchewan's Provincial Parks. The programs will be offered through a cooperative agreement with Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources and the Society.

Volunteers are required from the SNHS to present one program in Cypress Hills, Greenwater and Moose Mountain Provincial Parks and two programs in Duck Mountain Provincial Park for a total of five programs. Program dates are to be determined, but may be offered in conjunction with festival events occurring on weekends in the parks.

Programs should include a Saturday evening indoor presentation followed by a walk, ski or snowshoe the following day. Content should be appropriate for a winter park environment. Past programs have covered topics from wildlife in winter to snow facts. Program materials, i.e. audio visual equipment, props and snowshoes may be requested for loan from Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources.

S.P.R.R. will be providing the society with an honorarium of a set amount for each weekend event.

If you are interested in volunteering your time to share the magic of winter with others contact: **Lin Gallagher, 2920 Argyle Street, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 2A9** or telephone: **home 584-0696, office 787-2327.**



# SKIPPERS AND BUTTERFLIES OF CRIMSON LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK, ALBERTA

HAROLD W. PINEL, 1017 - 19 Avenue N.W., Calgary, Alberta. T2M 0Z8

Crimson Lake Provincial Park was established in 1949 and is located 8 miles northwest of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The park is 13.5 square miles in area in Township 40, Ranges 7 and 8 west of the Fifth Meridian. The two lakes in the park, Crimson and Twin, are believed to be spring fed or filled by seepage from the neighbouring wetlands. Crimson Lake Park is drained from the north and south by Buster and Prentice Creeks, respectively. Both these creeks flow into the North Saskatchewan River.

The study area is interesting ecologically because it is situated in a phytogeographic mixing zone known as the Boreal Foothills Ecoregion (Strong and Leggat, 1981).<sup>11</sup> This is the most arboreally diverse ecoregion in Alberta, and is recognized by the codominant occurrence of aspen, Balsam Poplar, and Lodgepole Pine. Aspen Parkland lies a relatively short distance to the east of the park. The main vegetative units of the Park are lowlands of bogs and bog forests, and mixed wood highlands. Approximately seventy-five to eighty percent of the study area is wetlands.

The wetlands represent a continuum of ecological succession illustrating a drying trend. The three bog communities in the area from wettest to driest are sedge bogs dominated by sedges, willows and Swamp Birch (*Betula pumila*); Tamarack-Swamp Birch bogs; and Black Spruce bog forests. In the study area, the successional trend resulting in Black Spruce bog forests does not always occur. It appears that a high

water table in conjunction with water seepage from neighbouring communities results in "permanent" wet bogs.

The mixed wood highlands vary from almost pure stands of aspen to pure stands of Lodgepole Pine, with the aspen dominated mixed woods being the most common.

Sand dunes are present in the study area. No active dunes now exist due to stabilization by vegetation. Fine-to-medium-grained aeolian sheet sand is often encountered between the dunes, but this is generally patchy and quite thin. In many places, the interdune areas are now filled with muskeg.

Various activities associated with oil companies and the construction of parks facilities have altered the landscape and natural flora. Oil companies are responsible for a good deal of land clearing for well sites, pipelines, and seismic lines. Exotic grasses and legumes now replace the natural ground cover.

Further information on the flora and vegetation can be found in Biggs et al.<sup>1</sup>

## Annotated List

The following list is the result of field observations and collections made by the author on 24 different days over a four-year period from 1981 to 1984, with a seasonal spread of 18 May to 18 August. Specific dates for which each species has been recorded are written in an abbreviated format (e.g. 18/5/84 means 18 May 1984).

Sightings and collections made by Norbert Kondla on the following days are also included: 16 May 1978, 19 June 1978, 31 May 1979, 26 June 1979, 16 April 1981, 28 July 1981. Most of the common names are from Hooper.<sup>6</sup> Scientific names mostly follow Howe for genus, and Miller and Brown for species and subspecies.<sup>7 8</sup>

#### HESPERIIDAE -- Skippers.

Northern Cloudy Wing (*Thorybes pylades*)

— Occasional in aspen woods and along cutlines and roadways in mixedwoods from mid-May to mid-June; 19/6/78, 31/5/79, 10/6/83, 15/6/84. It is at the western edge of its known range in southern Alberta in this study area.

Dreamy Dusky Wing (*Erynnis icelus*) —

Common in aspen woods and along cutlines in mixedwoods from mid-May to mid-June; 31/5/79, 10-11/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 15-16/6/84.

Persius Dusky Wing (*Erynnis persius*) —

Fairly common in aspen woods and along roadways from mid-June to mid-July; 10-11/6/83, 14/7/84.

Common Checkered Skipper (*Pyrgus communis communis*) — Recorded once on 16/6/84 on a dry sandy ridge in mixed forest. This is the northwesternmost record of this species in southern Alberta to date.

Arctic Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon mandan*) — Occasional along roadways and cutlines in aspen woods and mixed forest in mid-June; 11/6/83, 15-16/6/84.

Manitoba Skipper (*Hesperia comma manitoba*) — Occasional along sandy cutlines in mixedwoods and pine woods during the latter half of July; 27 + 29-31/7/82, 14/7/84. These are the easternmost records of this species away from the Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta.

Peck's Skipper (*Polites coras*) — Scarce along cutlines and roadways; 14/7/84. In this area, the species is at the western edge of its known range in southern Alberta.

Long Dash (*Polites mystic dacotah*) — Occasional along roadways and cutlines in aspen woods and pine woods during the latter half of July; 23 + 26 + 29/7/82, 13-15/7/84.

Roadside Skipper (*Amblyscirtes vialis*) —

Rare along a cutline in aspen woods; 15/6/84. This represents the westernmost record of this species, to date, in southern Alberta.

#### PAPILIONIDAE — Swallowtails.

Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus canadensis*) —

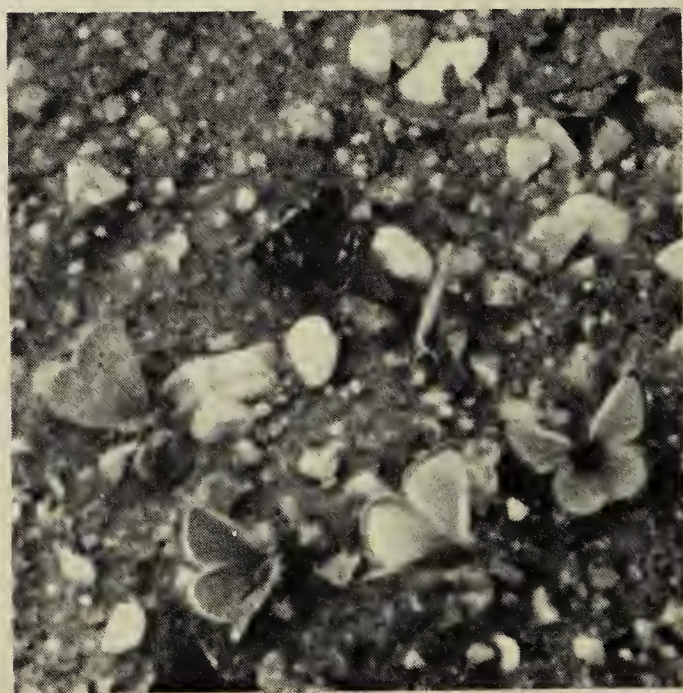
Common in aspen woods and mixed forest. Recorded from 9 June to 15 July, 29-30/6/81, 9-10/6/83, 14-16/6/84, 13 + 15/7/84.

#### PIERIDAE — Whites, Sulphurs and Marbles.

Western Checkered White (*Pieris occidentalis occidentalis*) —

Occasional in disturbed areas along roadways and on cutlines. Observed only on 17/8/84, but suspect it to be more common.

Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*) — Uncommon in disturbed areas around oil well sites, and along roadways and cutlines during August; 2/8/81, 17-18/8/84. The low abundance and short flight period of this ubiquitous species in this area is interesting. The increase in human disturbance in the area should lead to an increase in this species.



Arctic Skipper & Silvery Blues

Anon.



Large Marble (*Euchloe ausonides*) — Scarce along roadways in aspen woods. A few individuals were recorded on 11/6/83.

Alfalfa Butterfly (*Colias philodice eriphyle*) — Fairly common in disturbed areas. Reported from 10 June to 18 August; 29-31/7/82, 10-11/6/83, 15/6/84, 14/7/84, 17-18/8/84.

Alexandra Sulphur (*Colias alexandra astraea*) — Occasional along edges of aspen and mixed woods; 26 + 29-30/7/82, 14/7/84.

Giant Sulphur (*Colias gigantea gigantea*) — Fairly common, but local, in wet meadows during the latter half of July; 23 + 26/7/82, 14-15/7/84.

Pink-edged Sulphur (*Colias interior interior*) — Common in mixed forest and pine woods from 13 July to 18 August; 2/8/81, 23 + 26-27 + 29 + 31/7/82, 13-15/7/84, 16-18/8/84.

#### LYCAENIDAE — Gossamer-winged Butterflies.

Dorcas Copper (*Epidemia dorcas*) — Common in moist areas bordering tamarack bogs. Flight period recorded from 23 July to 18 August; 2/8/81, 23 + 26-27 + 29-31/7/82, 17-18/8/84.

Purplish Copper (*Epidemia helloides*) — Rare, a male was collected on 31/7/82 in a disturbed area around a well site. This is the westernmost known record for southern Alberta.

Mariposa Copper (*Epidemia mariposa penroseae*) — Scarce, a male was recorded on 2/8/81 on a cutline in mixed woods.

Brown Elfin (*Callophrys augustus*) — Common in sandy areas in pine woods and mixed woods from mid-May to mid-June; 31/5/79, 10-11/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 15-16/6/84.

Hoary Elfin (*Callophrys polios obscurus*) — Fairly common on sandy ridges in mixed woods or pine woods from mid-May to mid-June; 31/5/79, 18 + 20/5/84, 16/6/84.

Western Pine Elfin (*Callophrys eryphon*) — Occasional in pine woods; 31/5/79, 18/5/84.

Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*) — Individual recorded on 31/7/82 on a sandy ridge bordering mixed woods. In this area, the Gray Hairstreak is near the northwestern edge of its range in Alberta.

Western Tailed Blue (*Everes amyntula albrighti*) — Common in aspen and mixed woods with a recorded flight period of 9 June to 15 July; 1/7/81, 9-11/6/83, 15-16/6/84, 13-15/7/84.

Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*) — Fairly common in aspen woods and mixed forest; flight period recorded from 18 May to 16 June; 31/5/79, 9/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 15-16/6/84.

Silvery Blue (*Glaucopsyche lygdamus couperi*) — Common in aspen woods, mixed forest, and along cutlines and roadways; flight period recorded from 18 May to 17 August; 26/7/82, 9-11/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 15-16/6/84, 14/7/84, 17/8/84.

Scudder's Blue (*Lycaeides argyrognomon scudderi*) — Uncommon on sandy ridges in pine woods and mixed woods during the latter half of July; 23 + 29 + 31/7/82, 14/7/84.

Greenish Blue (*Plebejus saepiolus amica*) — Common in disturbed areas along roads, trails, cutlines, and well sites as well as damp meadows. Recorded flight period from 11 June to 30 July; 23 + 29-30/7/82, 11 + 16/6/83, 13-15/7/84.

Rustic Arctic Blue (*Plebejus franklinii rustica*) — Rare, an individual recorded on 10/6/83. This is the most northwestern report of this taxon in southern Alberta. *P.f. megalos* has been collected only 50 km west-southwest of the study area by C. Bird and D. Johnson.

#### NYMPHALIDAE — Brush-footed Butterflies.

Atlantis Fritillary (*Speyeria atlantis hollandi*) — Fairly common in mixed pine, spruce and aspen woods; flight period recorded from 14 July to 18 August; 2/8/81, 23 + 26-27 + 29-31/7/82, 14-15/7/84, 17-18/8/84.



Pearl Crescent

R.W. Knapton

Bean's Fritillary (*Speyeria atlantis beani*) - Common in mixed woods of pine, spruce and aspen from mid-July to mid-August; 2/8/81, 23 + 26-27 + 29-31/7/82, 14-15/7/84, 17-18/8/84.

Bog Fritillary (*Boloria eunomia dawsoni*) — Occasional in black spruce and tamarack bogs; 11/6/83, 14/7/84.

Silver-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*) - Fairly common in wet grassy meadows and bordering tamarack bogs; flight period recorded from 11 June to 2 August; 2/8/81, 23 + 26 + 29/7/82, 11/6/83, 13-14/7/84.

Meadow Fritillary (*Boloria bellona jenistai*) — Occasional along roadways and cutlines in poplar woods; 11/6/83, 15/6/84.

Frigga Fritillary (*Boloria frigga saga*) — Occasional in damp grassy areas bordering tamarack 5/79, 10-11/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 15-16/6/84.

Purple Lesser Fritillary (*Boloria titania grandis*) — Common in mixed forest, coniferous woods, and open areas adjacent woods; flight period recorded from 23 July to 18 August; 28/7/81, 2/8/81, 23 + 26-27 + 29-31/7/82, 16-18/8/84.

Woodland Pearl Crescent (*Phyciodes pascoensis*) — Common in aspen woods, mixed forest, grassy fields, and along roadways and cutline; flight period recorded from 9 June to 18 August; 29-30/6/81, 2/8/81, 23 + 26 + 30-31/7/82, 9 + 11/6/83, 15 + 16/6/84, 13-15/7/84, 17-18/8/84.

Tawny Crescent (*Phyciodes batesii*) — Occasional in poplar woods and along cutlines in mixedwoods during July; 26 + 29/7/82, 14-15/7/84. These are the westernmost known records of this species in southern Alberta.

Green Comma (*Polygonia faunus rusticus*) — Uncommon in poplar woods and mixed forest; flight period recorded from mid-May to mid-July; 11/6/83, 18 + 20/5/84, 16/6/84, 15/7/84.

Satyr Angle Wing (*Polygonia satyrus*) — Occasional in poplar woods and mixed forest; recorded for May and August; 31/5/79, 2/8/81, 18/5/84, 17/8/84.

Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) — Uncommon in poplar woods; two light periods recorded - one from mid-May to mid-June, the other during August; 11/6/83, 18/5/84, 17-18/8/84.

Milbert's Tortoise Shell (*Nymphalis milberti furcillate*) — Common in aspen woods and disturbed areas along cutlines and roadways. Flight period recorded from 16 April to 17 August; 31/5/79, 16/4/81, 2/8/81, 23 + 30-31/7/82, 18 + 20/5/84, 17/8/84.

White Admiral (*Limenitis arthemis rubrofasciata*) — Fairly common in aspen woods and mixed forest during July; 26-27/7/82, 13-15/7/84.

#### SATYRIDAE — Meadow Browns

Ringlet (*Coenonympha inornate benjamini*) — Occasional in grassy areas along roads; 2/8/81, 23 + 29 + 31/7/82.

Red-disked Alpine (*Erebia discoidalis*) — Occasional and local in open grassy areas during the latter half of May; 31/5/79, 18 + 20/5/84.



Common Alpine (*Erebia epipsodea*) — Common in open grassy areas, and along roadways and cutlines through wooded areas; flight period recorded from 9 June to 30 June; 29-30/6/81, 9-11/6/83, 14-16/6/84.

Macoun's Arctic (*Oeneis Macounii*) — Uncommon in mixed forest, and coniferous woods; flight period recorded from 9 June to 1 July in odd-numbered years only; 26/6/79, 1/7/81, 9-11/6/83.

Jutta Arctic (*Oeneis jutta ridingiana*) — Occasional in black spruce and tamarack bogs; 23 + 27/7/82, 14-15/7/84. This species is probably more abundant than I've indicated if it is more common in odd-numbered years as it is in northeastern Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>5 6</sup>

Summary

Fifty species have been recorded in the study area as follows: Hesperiidæ - 9, Papilionidæ - 1, Pieridæ - 7, Lycaenidæ - 13, Nymphalidæ - 15, Satyridæ - 5. On a monthly basis 13 species were recorded during May, 26 in June, 29 in July and 16 in August. The greatest diversity of species in the Rhopaloceran fauna of Crimson Lake Park occurs in mid-June (52%) and the end of July (44%). This obvious dual peak in species numbers is in contrast to other Alberta regional studies at Plateau Mountain, Banff National Park, Calgary Kananaskis Provincial Park and Indian Grave Recreational Area.<sup>2 3 4 8 10</sup>

Favourable habitats already exist in the study area for some species not recorded to date. These expected species include Tawny-edged Skipper (*Polites themistocles*), Mustard White (*Pieris napi*), Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), Gray Comma (*Polygonia progne*), Meadow Crescent (*Phyciodes campestris*), and Mancinus Alpine (*Erebia disa*). Undoubtedly, the Painted Lady, (*Vanessa cardui*), occurred in the area during their spectacular migrations of 1973 and 1983, but I have no evidence.

The presence of sand dunes in the area and the proximity of the Aspen Parkland increase the diversity of butterfly species recorded. This accounts for the presence of prairie-parkland species such as common Checkered Skipper, Gray Hairstreak and Rustic Arctic Blue. On the other hand, there is a low presence of cordilleran taxa considering the nearest mountain habitat is only 40 to 50 km away.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Norbert Kondla for supplying me with his collection data, for providing access to draft Alberta butterfly distribution maps, and for reviewing the manuscript.

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<sup>2</sup> BIRD, C.D. 1975 A calendar of the butterflies and skippers of the alpine area of Plateau Mountain. Alberta Naturalist 5:26-28.

<sup>3</sup> BIRD, C.D. 1975 A calendar of the skippers and butterflies of Banff National Park. Alberta Naturalist 5:71-75.

<sup>4</sup> BIRD, C.D. 1975 A revised calendar of the butterflies and skippers of Calgary. Calgary Field Naturalist 6:312-314.

<sup>5</sup> BIRD, C.D., G.J. HILCHIE, N.G. KONDLA, W.W. SMITH, E. KUYT, J.K. RYAN and T.W. THORMIN 1982 Butterflies of northeastern Alberta. Blue Jay 40:141-153.

<sup>6</sup> HOOPER, R.R. 1973 The butterflies of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. 216 pp.

<sup>7</sup> HOWE, W.H. 1975 The butterflies of North America. Doubleday and Company Inc., New York. 633 pp.

<sup>8</sup> KONDLA, N.G. and C.D. BIRD 1979 The skippers and butterflies of Kananaskis Provincial Park, Alberta. Blue Jay 37:73-85.

<sup>9</sup> MILLER, L.O., and F.M. BROWN 1981 A catalogue/checklist of the butterflies of America north of Mexico. The Lepidopterists Society. Memoir No. 2 280 pp.

<sup>10</sup> PINEL, H.W. 1983 Skippers and butterflies of the Indian Grave Campground area, Alberta. Blue Jay 41:71-77.

<sup>11</sup> STRONG W.L. and K.R. LEGGAT 1981 Ecoregions of Alberta. Alberta Energy and National Resources. 64 pp.

# THE EASTERN BLUEBIRD AT DAUPHIN, MANITOBA

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Dauphin, Manitoba (51° 05'N, 100° 05'W) is located on the northern fringe of the geographical range of the Eastern Bluebird and near the northeastern edge of the range of the Mountain Bluebird.<sup>1</sup> Despite regular birding excursions in the Dauphin area between 1971 and 1981, alarmingly few bluebirds were identified by the authors and associates. With the exception of two rural residences where bluebirds nested in nest boxes in some years during this period only one confirmed nesting was known to us (Table 1). With our concern for an apparently low population of bluebirds at Dauphin, 30 nest boxes were built by us in the late winter of 1981. H.M. Cobbe, Building Construction Instructor at the Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School, when approached, had his students build 35 nest boxes from scrap lumber that spring and an additional 35 the following winter.

In the spring of 1981, 65 nest boxes were erected southeast, southwest and northwest of Dauphin, often in areas where bluebirds had been sighted over the years and in places believed to constitute good bluebird habitat, i.e. closely grazed pastures with small groves of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) or scattered trees - mostly aspen, or both. Unfortunately, because of the preponderance of cultivated fields in the area, not all boxes were put up in what we considered to be good habitat. Frequently, suitable pastures occurred close to farm buildings, but such sites were nearly always avoided in the anticipation that bluebirds would be brought into competition with House Sparrows. Shrubby areas were shunned to discourage House Wrens. About 100 nest boxes were maintained in

1982 and again in 1983 as the trail was extended to include the area northeast of Dauphin. However, without a single bluebird nesting or sighting in that area in two years, these boxes were removed in the fall of 1983 and only 84 nest boxes were operated in 1984.

The most striking feature of the Dauphin nest box study over the first four seasons of its operation has been the absence of breeding Mountain Bluebirds (Table 2). This species nested at A. Pitch's 5 km northwest of Dauphin in 1975, 1976 and 1977 (Table 1), but we know of no other nestings for this area although the occasional summer occurrence of the Mountain Bluebird has been observed, but not recorded, by municipal grader operator Terry Jenkins (pers. comm.). Although bluebird sightings by the authors were few between 1971 and 1981, the Mountain was recorded much more frequently than the Eastern (Table 1). However, we have not positively identified a Mountain Bluebird in the Dauphin area since 2 males were seen together 1 April 1981 - the first spring that the nest boxes were set out! The only sight records of which we know since that date was one seen by A. and R. Pitch northwest of Dauphin 7 April 1983 and a pair that were seen southeast of Dauphin by Robert Carmichael at the Carmichael farm 25 March 1984. On the other hand, 23 successful nestings of Eastern Bluebirds were monitored between 1981 and 1984 (Table 2). With one exception, these are the only nesting records of this species in the area known to us since a family which included 6 young visited the Pitch farm 20 July 1975.



Table 1.1 BLUEBIRD RECORDS FOR THE DAUPHIN AREA, 1971-1981.<sup>a</sup>

<i>Mountain Bluebird</i>	Year	<i>Confirmed Nestings</i>		Arrival Date	#Young Fledged	Observer <sup>b</sup>	Month	<i>Sight Records</i>	
		#Nestings	Location					#Birds	Observer <sup>b</sup>
<i>Mountain Bluebird</i>	1981						March	1	c
							April	2	
	1980						March	1	c
							April	1 + 1 pr.	
	1979						June	1	
	1978						April	2	(1 by p)
	1977	2	A. Pitch yard	30 March (1 male)	4 on 22 July	p	April	1	
				6 April (first pr.)			October	4(incl. 1 imm.)	
	1976	2	A. Pitch yard	30 March (1 female)	3 on 14 June	p	April	1	
				3 April (first pr.)			May	1	
	1975	2	A. Pitch yard	13 April	3 on 20 June	p	March	4	(1 by f)
							May	1 + 1 pr. at nestbox	
	1974						22 November	1 sick	w
							7 April	3 males, 3 females	
	1973						March	1 + 1 pr.	
							May	1	
							June	2	
	1972						March	3	
							April	2	

a. Observation period of authors prior to nestbox placement in spring 1981.

b. Observations other than those by the authors: p - A. and R. Pitch, c - R. and D. Carmichael, b - A. Baker, w - G. Wilkie and f - C. Fisher



Table 1.2 BLUEBIRD RECORDS FOR THE DAUPHIN AREA, 1971-1981.<sup>a</sup>

<i>Eastern Bluebird</i>	Year	<i>Confirmed Nestings</i>		Arrival Date	#Young Fledged	Observer <sup>b</sup>	Month	<i>Sight Records</i>	
		#Nestings	Location					#Birds	Observer <sup>b</sup>
	1981						10 June	1 male	p
	1975	1?	near Pitch yard?	20 July family with 6 young in in yard		p			
	1974	2	A. Baker farm 19 km nne Dauphin, 3 km w Lake	"successful"		b			
	1973	1	CNR 4 km nw Dauphin	unknown			summer	? b(Baker farm)	
	1972						1 June	1 pr. Kippen's Mill site R.M.N.P.	
	1971						summer	? b	
							summer	? b	

a. Observation period of authors prior to nestbox placement in spring 1981.

b. Observations other than those by the authors: p - A. and R. Pitch, c - R. and D. Carmichael, b - A. Baker, w - G. Wilkie and f - C. Fisher



While the mortality of young between fledging and breeding is not known, it

would appear that this population is maintaining itself, with an average of 1.7 fledged young produced per adult.



*Carmichael-Durston area*



*Male Eastern Bluebird*

*W.J. Walley*

Table 3 shows the comparative status of the two bluebirds between Dauphin, Russell and Brandon. Significantly, Mountain Bluebirds are consistently more abundant than Eastern as a breeding bird west, southwest and south of Riding Mountain National Park compared to north of the park. Attention must be drawn to the small number of nest boxes operated out of Dauphin compared to much larger numbers spread over a much more extensive area in southwestern Manitoba maintained by the "Friends of the Bluebirds" out of Brandon and by Jim Spear (also a "Friend of the Bluebirds") of Russell whose lines extend from St. Lazare north to Shellmouth and into Saskatchewan. Nevertheless, the differences in the relative numbers of the two species at Dauphin and in the Russell area have been consistent through 1984 (Table 3). The Brandon area, while reporting considerably larger numbers of Mountain than Eastern from 1981 through 1983, has reported a gradual increase in the relative numbers of Eastern Bluebird nestings.<sup>2 3 5</sup> Twice as many were reported in 1983 as there were in 1981. However, a severe mid-May storm in 1983 which devastated nests - eggs and adults, of Mountain Bluebirds probably did not affect the later arriving Easterns as severely.<sup>5</sup>

From 1981 through 1984, 91% of all bluebird and swallow nestings at Dauphin were Tree Swallow nestings. This compares with a figure of 52% for the Brandon - Russell areas for 1981 through 1983. The much higher percentage of Tree Swallow utilization of nest boxes at Dauphin compared to areas south, southwest and west of Riding Mountain National Park, primarily reflects a much higher Tree Swallow than bluebird population in this area. In 1981, three of four Eastern Bluebird nestings commenced in mid-July immediately after the Tree Swallow families had vacated the nest boxes.



After the first year (1981) late nestings became the exception rather than the rule and it would appear that once the bluebirds know the location of the nest boxes they find them more quickly the following spring. The only late nesting in 1982 was strongly believed to be a second brood as the adults were observed with young-on-the-wing in a nearby aspen grove during incubation of the second clutch. The young of the presumed second brood were 2 to 3 days from leaving when the nest was visited 23 August. The first family had not been raised in any nest box that we knew about. While the adults were being photographed at the nest box 18 August, it was observed that the female was banded. The bird was caught and released after the number (1221/48553) was triple checked and recorded. This bluebird had been banded as a nestling 21 May, 1979 near Alleman, Iowa (about 40 km north of Des Moines) by D.D. Mosman of Elkhart, Iowa. Comparative arrival dates of and competition for nest boxes upon arrival in early spring between Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds at Dauphin require investigation.

The establishment of nest boxes failed to bring about an increase in bluebird nestings as we had hoped (Table 2). The bluebirds favoured three areas, all of which consisted of close-grazed pastures and nearby aspens, and nested in loose colonies. These included the Carmichael-Durston Area southeast of Dauphin, the Starkewski Area to the southwest - both areas just north of the boundary of Riding Mountain National Park - and the Telfer Area northwest of Dauphin. At the Telfer Area three simultaneous nestings were located in little over 1.5 ha (4.5 acres) in 1981. In 1983, three of six nestings occurred within 3 km in the Starkewski Area while two were within 3 km in the Carmichael-Durston Area about 8 km away. In 1984, only one nesting was recorded at Starkewski's despite the fact that two nest boxes were not used by any species in that area. In the same year, five nestings of six nestings occurred in the Carmichael-Durston Area. Colonial nesting

or nesting in "pockets" by Eastern Bluebirds was reported by Ann Smith and by Jim Spear (pers. comm.) who observed seven breeding pairs in a small area along the river in the Assiniboine Valley west of Russell in 1974. Another Eastern Bluebird nest was found there in 1981.

It is odd that apparently equal habitats failed to attract any bluebirds. Perhaps strong Tree Swallow competition in these areas explains the absence of bluebirds, but late nestings by bluebirds after the swallows were finished were never attempted in these areas. In one excellent location, European Starlings occurred in nearby aspen groves where they nested in natural cavities, but there was no evidence that they bothered the Tree Swallows that successfully reared young in nest boxes nearby. On the advice of Ann Smith of Brandon to locate nest boxes in sandy areas, 18 were set out along Highway 10 north of Ashville in the spring of 1984. This highway is on the gravel substrate of the former beaches of Lake Agassiz. However, only Tree Swallows used the boxes in the first year. Miller's description of the comparative nesting habitats of Mountain and Eastern Bluebirds suggests that this area of gravel substrate would attract the former.<sup>4</sup> The area will be watched with interest in 1985.

In the late summer of 1982, one of a very few House Sparrow nests was found in a nest box in the Telfer Area adjacent to the CNR tracks northwest of Dauphin. In the spring of 1983 House Sparrows were believed to have made their way through 400 m of aspen forest from the Telfer farmyard to the nest boxes. Despite the fact that one Eastern Bluebird family was successfully reared in late June, the sparrows took over. Sixteen of their nests were terminated in late June and July, but there was no discouraging them. In late July we were forced to remove the nest boxes from the area. An attempt was made to re-establish some of them in late May 1984. Only four boxes were set out. Two weeks later two of the four boxes contained House Sparrow nests



Table 2. NEST BOX DATA — DAUPHIN, MANITOBA, 1981-1984

		Attempted Nestings	Successful <sup>a</sup> Nestings	Eggs	Young	Hatching <sup>b</sup> Rate	Young Fledged	Fledged Young/Adult
Eastern Bluebird	1984	6	6	32	25	78%	24	2.0
	1983	8	6	36	23	64%	23	1.4
	1982	7	7	34	26	76.5%	26	1.9
	1981	4	4	15	13	86.6%	13	1.6
	Total	25	23	117	87	74.4%	86	1.7
Tree Swallow	1984		66					
	1983		76	466	425	91.2%	395	
	1982		64					
	1981		48	280				
House Sparrow	1984	3						
	1983	16						
	1982	3						
	1981	2						
House Wren	1981		4					

a. At least two young fledged.

b. Young hatched as a percent of eggs laid.

Table 3. COMPARATIVE USE OF NEST BOXES BY BLUEBIRDS NEAR RIDING MOUNTAIN

Year	North — Dauphin				West — Russell <sup>b</sup>				South — Brandon <sup>b</sup>			
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1981	1982	1983 <sup>c</sup>	1984	1981 <sup>d</sup>	1982 <sup>e</sup>	1983 <sup>f</sup>	1984
Mountain Bluebird	0	0	0	0	109	127	33	63	618	535	461	n/a
Eastern Bluebird	4	7	6	6	1	1	0	0	43	71	87	n/a
<hr/>												
Percent of Mountain Bluebirds # nest boxes used/year	87 (range 64 - 100)				99.4% 275				86.9% 1,800 ±			

a. Data from Jim Spear (pers. comm.) The Russell data has been separated from the Brandon report for the purpose of this article.

b: Unidentified bluebird species and hybrids not reported here.

c. Does not include heavy losses in mid-May storm.

d. Mrs. J. Lane, et al. 1982<sup>2</sup>.

e. Mrs. J. Lane, et al. 1983<sup>3</sup>.

f. A. Smith, et al. 1984<sup>5</sup>.



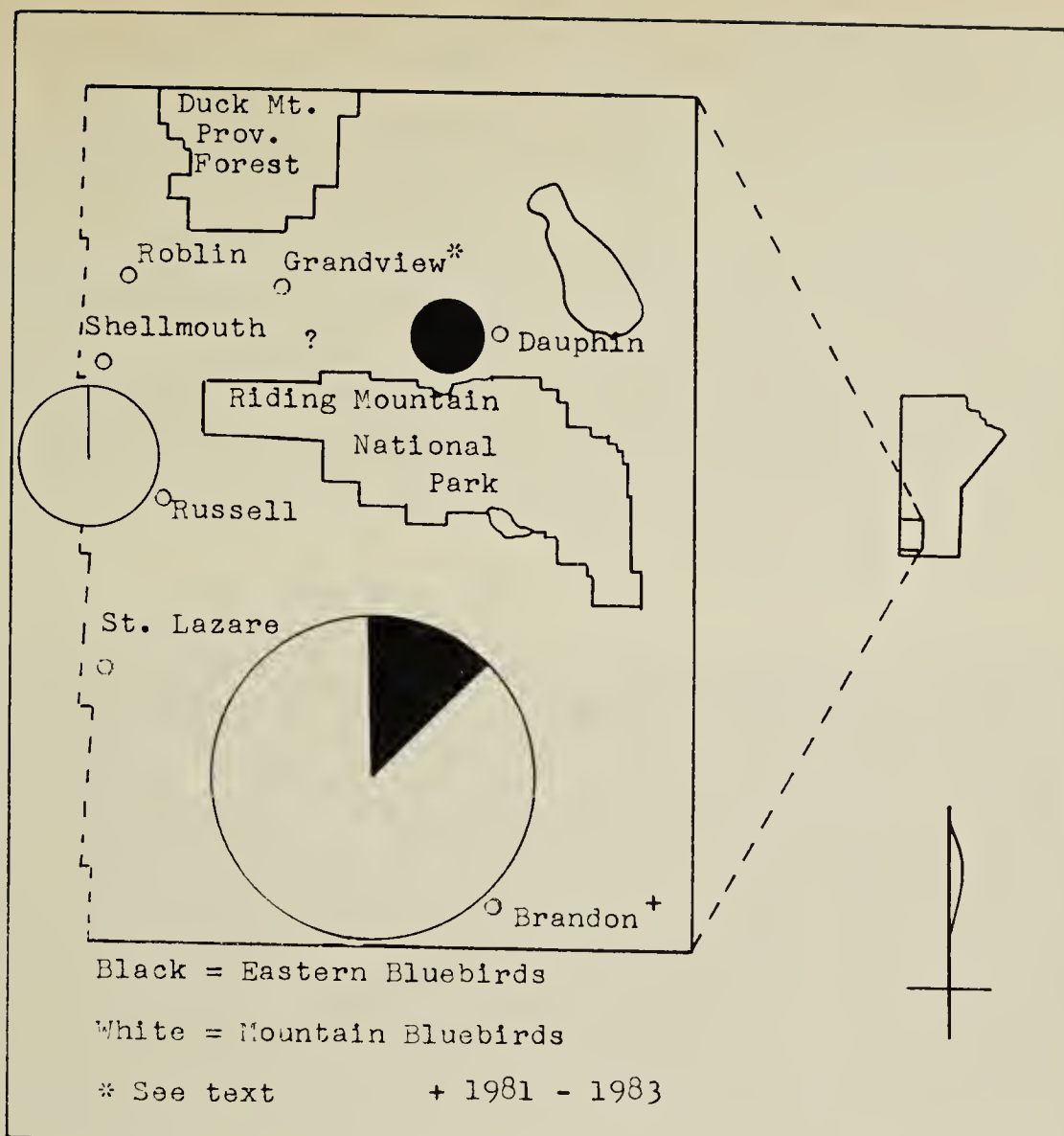


Figure 1. *Proportion of Eastern Bluebirds and Mountain Bluebirds in nest boxes in west-central Manitoba, 1981-1984.*

and another contained three recently killed adult Tree Swallows - doubtless the work of the sparrows. The 18 attempted House Sparrow nestings here (1983 and 1984) constituted 75% of all the attempted House Sparrow nestings in our nest boxes in the 4 years.

In 1984, nest box 12 in the Carmichael-Durston Area was occupied by Tree Swallows, so a second nest box (23) was set up only 20 m away. It was hoped that the swallows in box 12 would, as part of their territorial defense, keep other Tree Swallows out of box 23 thus allowing bluebirds to nest in it. While this ploy had been tried several times by us before without success, it did result in an Eastern Bluebird nesting this time. On 17 June the

nest contained five bluebird eggs, but on 19 July the female was incubating eight eggs! About 28 July two eggs hatched and the two young eventually fledged. None of the other six eggs contained discernible embryos. In 1983, nest box 12 contained five white Eastern Bluebird eggs, the only white bluebird eggs observed in the 4-year study. Only two of these eggs hatched. Of 87 young bluebirds that hatched in the 4-year study, 86 fledged. This is a success rate of almost 99%.

With Mountain being the more abundant bluebird south, southwest and west of Riding Mountain National Park and Eastern being the only bluebird to nest in the Dauphin nest boxes, it was of interest to

know how far west the Eastern breeds north of Riding Mountain National Park (Figure 1). It was deemed appropriate that a nest box line should be operated in the Grandview area to establish the status of the two species there. Ironically, shortly after planning such a line for 1985, the senior author learned from John Ross of Grandview that he had maintained 42 nest boxes on an east-west line a few miles north of the park, south of Grandview, in the summer of 1972. It was with great interest that we learned from Ross that he had had 27 Mountain and 1 Eastern nesting along with 6 Tree Swallows that summer.

Amazingly the Eastern nesting had occurred at the east end of the line — the end closest to Dauphin! Ross has also maintained since 1973 five nest boxes north of Grandview, just outside the Duck Mountain Provincial Forest, in grazed pastures; they have been used regularly by Mountain Bluebirds. Ten houses put up in 1975, 1.5 km north of Grandview and running east, have been used only by Tree Swallows. Ross plans to resume the next box line south of Grandview in 1985 extending it farther to the east.

'The bluebird data herewith reported for the Dauphin area does not purport to suggest that the Mountain no longer nests in this area. The area covered by the authors is too local. With the exception of the line of 18 nest boxes established north of Ashville in the spring of 1984, all of the boxes at Dauphin would fit within a 35 km diameter circle. This is too small an area to make generalisations about the region east of Grandview and north of the Riding Mountains. More accurate knowledge concerning the status of the two species here can only be obtained if the trails are expanded, e.g., north to Winnipegosis and east to Ste. Rose du Lac, etc. Our goal now is to recruit assistance to carry out this expansion.

Since the nest box trail was begun in 1981, Robert Carmichael has reported two late season observations at his farm. On 7

October 1982 a flock of 15 Eastern appeared and a single Eastern was seen at a nest box in late October 1983. The earliest record for any bluebird in this general area as observed by the authors was a male Mountain Bluebird seen by Walley just south of Cowan, Manitoba, northeast of the Duck Mountains 15 March 1975. The latest record we know about was that of a male Mountain that showed up in a very weakened condition at the Gene Wilkie farmyard at Dauphin 22 November 1975.

### Acknowledgements

Gratitude is expressed to the following for their bluebird records, observations, advice or hospitality on their farms: Adrian Baker, Robert and David Carmichael, Al and Ruth Pitch, John Ross, Ann Smith, Jim Spear, and Wilf Telfer. Special thanks goes to Howard Cobbe for having the nest boxes constructed at the school. Acknowledgement is made of the late Jack Lane's great enthusiasm back in the early seventies which helped to motivate us to get a nest box line going at Dauphin. Finally, appreciation is extended to John E. Walley who influenced the senior author, his son, to give the bluebirds a helping hand.

<sup>1</sup> GODFREY, W.E. 1966. The birds of Canada. Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 203

<sup>2</sup> LANE, Mrs. J., M. McCOWAN, B. ROBINSON, H. PATMORE and A. SMITH. 1982. Twenty-first nest box report from Brandon, Manitoba. Blue Jay 40:45-47

<sup>3</sup> LANE, Mrs. J., M. McCOWAN, B. ROBINSON, H. PATMORE and A. SMITH. 1983. Twenty-second nest box report from Brandon, Manitoba. Blue Jay 41:39-41

<sup>4</sup> MILLER, W. 1970. Factors influencing the status of Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds in southwestern Manitoba. Blue Jay 28:38-46

<sup>5</sup> SMITH, A., N. LANE, H. PATMORE, B. ROBINSON, D. BARNES and M. McCOWAN. 1984. Twenty-third nest box report from Brandon, Manitoba. Blue Jay 42:42-46

<sup>6</sup> WALLEY, W.J. Personal field notes, 1971-1984.



# 1984 CALGARY AREA BLUEBIRD TRAIL RESULTS

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Following are the results of the sixth year of monitoring of Calgary area bluebird trails by members of the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society. Calgary area bluebird trails were

increased this year to 939 boxes on 582 miles of line, and fledged approximately 1900 Mountain Bluebirds and 2300 Tree Swallows.



*Mountain Bluebird*

*Andrius Valadka*



Table 1. CALGARY AREA NEST BOX RESULTS 1984

	Southwest	Blake Stillings	Northwest	Northeast	Seebe - Canmore	TOTALS
No. of Boxes	282	341	180	97	39	939
Miles of Line	154	250	95	62	21	582
MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS						
No. of Nests	85e*	222	71	59	7	444
Successful Nests	92e	204	61	28	6	371e
% Successful	84	92	86	47	86	84e
No. of Eggs	412e	1205e	369	322	36	2344e
No. Young Fledged	336e	1064	328	147	31	1906e
Clutch Size	4.85e	5.43e	5.20	5.46	5.14	5.28e
Young/Successful Nest	4.67e	5.22	5.38	5.25	5.17	5.14e
Banded		2	129	92	223	
TREE SWALLOWS						
No. of Nests	194e	173	115	47	4	533e
Successful Nests	167e	160	82	36	3	448e
% Successful	86e	92	71	77	75	84e
No. of Eggs	1043e	972e	571	250	17	2853e
No. Young Fledged	851e	851	413	175	15	2305e
Clutch Size	5.38e	5.62e	4.97	5.32	4.25e	5.35e
Young/Successful Nest	5.10e	5.32	5.04	4.86	5.0	5.15e
Banded		1	134	61		196
HOUSE SPARROW						
HOUSE WREN	16	18	12	17	0	63
MULTIPLE USE	6	2	4	1	0	13
VANDALIZED	45	94	34	37	1	211
BOXES NOT USED	8	12	14	5	4	43
	10	3	6	1	19	39.

\* e estimated



For bluebirds 1984 was a banner year, primarily due to an early spring and an unseasonably warm month of May. This allowed an early start of nesting and a dramatic increase over 1983 in bluebirds from 214 first broods to 328 — a 53% increase!

Part of the increase was accounted for by members increasing the number of boxes by 15%. But Tree Swallows showed only a modest increase of 10% (less than the increase in box numbers). On several of the trails the clutch size for Tree Swallows was less than that of bluebirds (i.e. Elkton 5.47:5.61 and East Didsbury 5.32:5.46 for Tree Swallow:bluebird). Normally Tree Swallows have slightly larger clutch sizes as determined by Pinel between 1973 and 1978, with Tree Swallows at 5.71 and bluebird clutches averaging 5.26.

### **Project Nestbox Alberta**

The year was significant for the start of Project Nestbox Alberta, which is a federally funded summer project. Seven students were hired to cover the province, listing data on nestbox dimensions, habitat and occupancy. Calgary area's student was Eileen Dyck, who faithfully contacted each monitor and accompanied them on their trails acquiring the needed information. We all enjoyed working with Eileen and look forward to the results which will tell us such things as which nestbox type and hole size has highest bluebird occupancy.

### **New Breeding Species**

Two pairs of Western Bluebirds were reported in the foothills,<sup>1</sup> and a pair of Violet-green Swallows were reported by Kay Morck to be nesting at a farm near Springbank (in press).

### **Missing Eggs and Young**

First time monitors wanted to know why sometimes fewer eggs were present at subsequent monitorings, or fewer young hatched than there were eggs, with no ad-

ditional eggs in the nest. Bryan Shantz of Ellis Bird Farm had the following answers:

Occasionally miscounting occurs, but not enough to account for most cases. Infertile eggs, although sometimes still found present after fledging, may also be removed by the adult birds. Predation by House Sparrows or House Wrens is possible. Human intervention is also possible, but is expected to be rare.

Probably the most likely explanation is the predation. Sparrows or wrens will peck the eggs, and the bluebirds will remove broken shells. Similarly, if infertile eggs are broken the adult usually removes the shells.

### **Observations**

#### *Bluebirds*

A clutch of 8 bluebird eggs hatched and fledged successfully. One bluebird nest included string in its construction. A single fledgling entangled its foot in this string, and in its desperate attempts to leave the nest had broken the leg right off, however it still remained held by its upper leg. When freed, it flew off — no doubt to an early fate.

In a case of vandalism someone shot between the 6 and 4 on box 64 but missed the bluebird; she must not have been on the nest at the time.

On one section of trail 52 out of 56 boxes contained bluebird nests. Of these 45 were successful. It was not immediately obvious why that loop of the trail should have so many more bluebirds than adjacent loops, since the habitat looks much the same. One box in this group hatched six young, which had all died with the perfect half shells still in the box. Blake Stillings, the monitor, stated "I think the hen bird was killed just before the eggs hatched and heat from embryo and sun completed the hatch, then young died and egg shells were never removed.

One nest contained two young bluebirds estimated to be about 4 and 8 days old. It appeared that one egg from a first clutch and one from a later clutch also hatched. Both of these birds fledged.

*Tree Swallows*

For the first time in two years there was a report of a double brood of Tree Swallows, with 10 young fledging from one nest. In each of three nest boxes two broods of swallows were raised. Although rare in Alberta, this does happen occasionally if the first brood is started early. In one nest box a brood of Tree Swallows followed two broods of bluebirds.

In a situation similar to the bluebird nest with the string, an adult Tree Swallow was caught in plastic filament, became tangled, and died.

Two trails had Tree Swallows only and no bluebirds. Again there were reports of dead broods of Tree Swallows which were at least half grown. In some instances there was evidence of disease, with the young incompletely feathered, but not always. Fortunately, there were only 2 or 3 such cases per trail.

*Other Species*

Chickadee nests were again reported, with two nests each of Black-capped and Mountain chickadees. One of the Black-capped Chickadee nests was on a trail where they had not nested before, but it was not successful.

House Sparrows continue to plague one monitor. Although seven House Sparrow prone boxes were removed last year, there were ten boxes with first time House Sparrow nests in them this year. This trail is 6-8 years old and most of the houses are over 0.5 mi. from buildings.

**Paired Boxes**

An experiment in 1984 was the extensive use of paired boxes. The biological theory for paired boxes is that a nesting species will tolerate another species nearby, but not another pair of its own kind. With paired boxes it was believed the Tree Swallows would use the second box and not drive out the bluebirds, as they frequently do when they arrive after the bluebirds have already begun nesting. The results of the paired box trials are given in Table 2. The distance between paired boxes varied from 3 to 25 m, with the most common spacing between 10 and 15 m. At present the distance apart does not seem to matter and further experimentation would be needed to determine if it is critical.

One monitor paired all 31 boxes on the trail. While this did result in 9 cases where bluebirds and Tree Swallows used adjacent boxes, 22 other pairs had one box vacant. Of the nine pairs where both boxes were used the Mountain Bluebirds used the old flat-topped boxes in seven and the new slant-roofed boxes in only two cases. Since the bluebirds arrive about a month earlier, they have first choice of boxes.

Table 2. RESULTS OF USING PAIRED NEST BOXES

<i>Pairing</i>	<i>Bluebird + Swallow</i>	<i>Bluebird/Swallow + Vacant</i>	<i>Swallow + Swallow</i>	<i>TOTALS</i>
All boxes on line	9	22		31
Paired during season	6	1		7
Paired at beginning of season.	4	2	1	7





*Paired boxes show two styles. This pair was used by Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.*

Two monitors carried extra boxes with them when monitoring. When a pair of Tree Swallows appeared in the vicinity of an active Bluebird nest, a second box was set up 10-15 m from the existing box. The system was successful, with the Tree Swallows using six out of the seven pairs created.

Other monitors had seven pairs of boxes in place at the beginning of the season. Four of these attracted both bluebirds and swallows, two pairs had one box vacant and the remaining pair had both boxes used by swallows. In this latter case both houses were at the edge of Aspen Poplar woods.

In two cases the bluebirds and swallows "switched" houses from where they originally started to nest.

In general the paired boxes appear to have a high success ratio, particularly where

competition between bluebirds and swallows is known to occur, or suspected. Calgary area monitors will be putting up more paired boxes in coming seasons.

### **Banding in 1984**

Ray Woods and Don Stiles both banded in 1984. The results are presented in Table 3. Recaptures and returns are noted in Table 4. Recaptures are mostly birds banded as adults.

The 1984 Mountain Bluebird recaptures were females recaptured in the same nest with a second brood. Of the eight adults banded in previous years, six were found in the same house and the other two within a mile of the original banding site. The single young recaptured was 2 miles from the nest site.

Table 3. BANDING RESULTS 1984

<i>Species</i>	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Young</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mountain Bluebird	36	187	223
Tree Swallow	60	136	196

Five of the 15 adult Tree Swallows recaptured were in the same house, 7 were within 2.5 mi. and the remaining 3 within 6 mi. The three young recaptured were found 1.5, 8.5 and 10.5 mi. from the banding site. This suggests that young are much more wide ranging in their search for nest sites than are the adults. Two adult Tree Swallows have been recaptured twice. Both were banded as adults (in 1981 and 1982), and both were recaptured in the same nest box in which they had been banded in 1983 and 1984.

The band returns from Mountain Bluebirds were both from adult males. both

banded as young in 1983. One died 25 June when it flew into a patio window 0.5 miles from where it was banded. The other was found dead in a horse trailer near Okotoks 7 September 1984. It was banded and color banded by Bryan Shantz northeast of Red Deer. It had raised a brood in 1984, and the female had raised a second brood.

The single Tree Swallow return was from a young banded in 1981, 7 mi. east and 2 mi. north of Didsbury, Alberta. It died in a bird house in 1983 at Diamond City, Alberta about 5 mi. north of Lethbridge (probably killed by House Sparrows). This is about 130 miles from where the bird was banded as a young.

Table 4. RECAPTURES AND BAND RETURNS 1984

<i>Species/Age when Banded</i>	<i>Year Banded:</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>1981</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	
RECAPTURES					
Mountain Bluebird					
Adult		1	7	2	10
Young			1		1
Tree Swallow					
Adult	1	3	11		15
Young		1	2		3
RETURNS					
Mountain Bluebird					
Young			2		2
Tree Swallow					
Young	1				1



# COMMENTARY ON GRACKLES ANTING WITH MARIGOLD BLOSSOMS

JOHN V. DENNIS, P.O. Box 116, Princess Anne, Maryland 21853 U.S.A.

Jean Bancroft alerted me to the fact that Common Grackles had been noted anting with marigolds in Winnipeg in recent years. Nero and Hatch have given us a detailed account of this habit and a possible reason for the grackles indulging in this strange performance.<sup>3</sup>

In a chapter of *Beyond the bird feeder* devoted to anting, I drew upon the studies of Australian Alec Chisholm and students Doris Hauser and Eloise Potter who researched the subject in North Carolina over 10 years ago.

Chisholm, during the course of his studies on anting in birds, collected information on insecticidal plants that birds use in their nests.<sup>1</sup> He stated that House Sparrows in Australia mutilated a pyrethrum plant for three successive years in order to use the foliage in their nests. Other reputedly insecticidal plants used by birds in Australia for nesting purposes included lavender-cotton, thyme and common rue. I have added yarrow to this list on the basis of having seen House Sparrows use the aromatic foliage of this plant in nests built in birdhouses in Virginia.

I have suggested caution in interpreting the use of aromatic herbs by birds as a method of ridding their plumage or nests of parasites: "If they 'knew' that ants or their acids helped control these pests (a debatable point), they might be expected to be equally versed in using insecticidal plants on their plumage in the same way they use ants. Plant materials of various kinds are used by birds in anting, but none of them, so far as I am aware, have conspicuous insect-killing properties."<sup>3</sup>

The birds in Winnipeg were, however, anting with plants with insecticidal properties. The marigolds contain pyrethrum, a well known insecticide.<sup>4</sup> Pyrethrum is the common name for the chrysanthemum (*C. coccineum*) which is the source of the insecticide pyrethrum.<sup>6</sup> This is described as being the least toxic to man and animals of all the insecticides. The source is the flower heads, and not the foliage (as was used by the sparrows in their nests).

Numerous students of the subject have concluded that birds use ants and other substances to rid their plumage of parasites, but I doubt that it is the main reason. Chisholm was of the opinion that birds use acidulous substances for skin stimulus and "plumage cleansing" and states that these two uses may be interlocked with each other and also with the use by birds of sunlight, water, dust and smoke for the benefits of their bodies.<sup>1</sup>

Similar, independent conclusions were reached by Hauser and Potter, who observed anting behaviour in their respective yards in North Carolina (they were acquainted only through correspondence). They concluded that anting in birds was closely related to the molt period and that it was a method of reducing skin irritation associated with feather loss and that, at the same time, it produced pleasurable sensations.

I would place more emphasis upon the pleasure motive; many observations note the excitement and enjoyment shown by birds when they go through these antics. A Red-browed Finch, kept as an aviary bird

in England, "appeared to go into an ecstatic trance" when exposed to ants and "lay on his back, feet pointing upward, in the middle of the ant-nest..." Robert Parsons of Winnipeg told of a grackle rubbing the petals of marigolds through his feather particularly those of the breast and wings — "Presently they were all doing this and began acting as if they were drunk, seemingly unable to balance as they swayed from side to side."<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, house cats have been observed anting with obvious pleasure in Australia and there are several records of anting by squirrels in the United States. Christine Dunham of Chestertown, Maryland, reported to me the only example of which I am aware of anting by a cat outside of Australia. This animal, a 12-year-old altered black cat (believed to be half Siamese), was in the habit of turning over pieces of wood to search for ants. The cat would eat some of the ants it found and allow others to swarm over its nostrils and head. The animal evinced signs of obvious enjoyment.

It seems appropriate to mention the special attraction that yellow flowers have for birds. Darwin wrote of yellow primroses and other yellow flowers being cut off by birds and strewn on the ground. He suspected that Greenfinches (*Carduelis chloris*) were doing the damage and that they were seeking nectar in the blossoms.<sup>2</sup> Since then numerous accounts of birds attacking flowers have appeared. Yellow crocuses and primroses seem to suffer the most damage. A British gardener told me that House Sparrows commonly pecked the yellow buds in her crocuses but did not eat them.

I had not previously seen any references to birds damaging marigolds, but I have observed House Sparrows tearing apart marigold blossoms in England. On 1 October 1981 House Sparrows at Canterbury plucked yellow marigold blossoms and flew off with portions of the flowers in their bills.

The seeds in these blossoms were still green and presumably were not being used for food. This observation was followed by one 13 October of House Sparrows in Wembly (a suburb of London) tearing apart marigold blossoms in a residential yard.

About the same time a House Sparrow in Wembly was seen flying off with a cigarette butt in its bill. As with the marigold observations, I was unable to determine what use was being made of the object in question. It is known however, that tobacco is one of the substances that birds use in anting. Chisholm reported anting with lighted cigarettes by the Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) and Magpie in Europe and the Blue Jay in North America.

The fact that grackles in Winnipeg have been found to ant with blossoms rich in pyrethrum does indicate a purposeful object in this behaviour. But I would suggest that further observations are needed. Do the birds indeed have parasites in their feathers? Recent studies show that birds are generally far freer of feather parasites during the molting season (when anting is at its height) than any other time of the year. Potter (pers. comm.) writes that feather mites fluctuate with the amount of lipid substance on the feather. "This substance and mites are at a low level during the molting season because newly emerged feathers have been oiled only a few times and mites have not had a chance to infest them."

In the extensive literature on anting, there are many reports of anting birds not having any parasites at all on their skin or feathers. For example, Margaret Nice and Joost Ter Pelkwyk wrote in 1940 of aviary Song Sparrows which had no parasites and which at the ages of 36 and 37 days applied ants and also sumac berries to their plumage.<sup>5</sup>

Although anting by grackles would not appear to be in the best interests of those who grow marigolds in Winnipeg, it should



bring joy to the hearts of bird watchers. Here is a golden opportunity to learn more about the poorly understood habit of anting in birds. Do birds ant because the substances they use pleasantly stimulate the skin and, in some instances, act as a counter-irritant, or does the habit have a more utilitarian purpose?

I am grateful to Jean Bancroft for keeping me informed about recent outbreaks of grackles anting with marigold blossoms.

<sup>1</sup> CHISHOLM, A.H. 1959 The history of anting. *Emu* 59:101-130

<sup>2</sup> DARWIN, C. 1874 Flowers of the primrose destroyed by birds. *Nature* 10:24

<sup>3</sup> DENNIS, J.V. 1981 *Beyond the bird feeder*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York

<sup>4</sup> NERO, R.W. and D.R.M. HATCH 1984 Common grackles anting with marigold flowers. *Blue Jay* 42(4):212-214

<sup>5</sup> NICE, M. and J. TER PELKWYK 1940 'Anting' by the Song Sparrow. *Auk* 57:520-522.

<sup>6</sup> RODALE, J.I. (Ed.) 1959 *Encyclopedia of organic gardening*. Emmaus, Pa.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** An article on anting "Anting antics," by Eloise F. Potter, just appeared in the summer issue of *The Living Bird* 4(3):12-15.

## FIRST SAGE THRASHER SIGHTING IN MANITOBA

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The senior author has been studying Western Meadowlarks along the Assiniboine Diversion near its mouth at Lake Manitoba. On 10 June 1984, at 0530 h the authors were watching a meadowlark near the Peters' farmhouse about 10 km south of the lake, when an unusual bird was noted beneath the meadowlark.

At first glance, it was apparent that it was a rare bird. It was three-quarters the size of the meadowlark and slim, with upperparts and legs the color of dry modeling clay. The breast had many narrow streaks of that color. Otherwise, the breast was a dirty, pale, brownish-white. The tail was distinctly darker than the back, with white tips to the

outer feathers that became obvious when the bird flew. No obvious wingbars were seen. The most striking features were the yellow eye, moustaches bordering the throat, a short, slender and slightly decurved bill, pale toward the base, and the breast streaking.

After almost 3 minutes of observations the bird was identified as a Sage Thrasher. Having observed Crissal, Brown and California Thrashers in the wild, Horn was struck by this species' small size and short bill. The thrasher ran and paused in typical thrush fashion, but with the more horizontal posture and protruded head of a thrasher.

The bird was watched for about 30 min. from 15 to 50 m away, with 7x50 binoculars and a 20x100 spotting scope. Spencer Sealy of the University of Manitoba was present part of this time and agreed with the identification, drawing on previous experience with nesting Sage Thrashers in the Okanagan Valley, B.C. He notified birders in the Winnipeg area, so that by 12 June, when the bird was last seen, it had been observed by at least eight parties and had been photographed.

Typical habitat around the Peters' farmhouse consisted of cultivated and hay fields. The bird was seen along a gravel road by

the farmhouse, on some bare ground among planted conifer seedlings, and in tall cultivated shrubs around the house.

Although the Sage Thrasher does nest in Saskatchewan and North Dakota,<sup>1</sup> this is the first sighting for Manitoba.

#### **Acknowledgements**

We thank Spencer Sealey for helping to confirm the sighting. Ian Jones commented on a draft of the manuscript.

<sup>1</sup> GODFREY, W.E. 1966 The birds of Canada. National Museums of Canada. Bull. 203. 428 pp.



*Sage Thrasher*

*Dennis Fast*



# SIGHT RECORDS OF COMMON EIDER IN SASKATCHEWAN AND NORTH-WESTERN MANITOBA

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On 10 August 1969 I was surprised to see a female Common Eider ahead of our canoes as my five companions and I paddled along Granville Lake (Manitoba) in the Churchill River system. The large size, dark brown colour, sloping bill, and heavily barred sides combined to identify the bird as an eider, and the long slope of the bill and straight vertical nature of the bars separated the bird from all other eider species. The bird was seen well by all members of the party (Jim Buckingham, Ed Boudreaux, Patricia Kohlberg, George Lammers, Helen Lloyd and myself), although the others did not take notes on its plumage. As we approached, the eider flapped her wings, showing two white thin lines. She appeared to be unable to fly and was thought to be in moult. There was no sign of any white among the brown horizontal barring in the throat area, suggesting that this was not likely a male in eclipse plumage.

Although Common Eiders breed at Churchill, where they are among the specialties sought by birders, they occur only casually elsewhere in Manitoba.<sup>3 6 8</sup> Godfrey listed two specimen records for southern Manitoba, but examination of several reports of trips in northern Manitoba away from Hudson Bay revealed no other records for interior areas.<sup>3 10</sup> Of the two reports closest to our canoe route, Hooper had no records for the Lynn Lake area, and Weber did not include any records for Southern Indian Lake and surrounding areas.<sup>4 17</sup> A survey study of Warkworth Creek, close to Churchill in 1968 failed to find any even in this location very close to its regular range.<sup>9</sup> The Hudson Bay population, described by several authorities as a distinct race, is

sedentary, even wintering on open parts of Hudson and James bays, and the brown, rather than grey colouration of the bird we saw suggests that it was not a bird of this race.<sup>1 3 14 16</sup> Thus, our eider had likely wandered from a point farther from its regular range than would appear from the species' range map.

On the morning of 15 June 1979 an adult male Common Eider was seen far inland from Hudson Bay. I was surveying lakes by plane in the vicinity of the McMahan Lakes in northern Saskatchewan with L. Ronald Quaife and pilot, Terry Bridle when we saw the eider on a small lake north of Henday Lake. This lake is not named on the maps that I have inspected. It is the largest of three lakes in a chain connected by small streams to the north of the northwestern-most bay of Henday. The smallest lake in the chain is directly west of a northern finger of the lake on which we observed the eider. The eider was close to the western shore, just south of the creek connecting the lake with its tiny companion. The sloping yellowish bill, white back, black tail and sides, black crown, greenish neck, and white throat and face of this bird distinguish it from any other North American duck. All three of us observed it well as we flew northwards along the lake and circled it for a double-check of the identification. The sighting was included in an environmental impact statement and mentioned briefly in a review by Houston, but details have not been published previously.<sup>2 5</sup>

In my report on the birds of the area, I mentioned the unusual nature of an eider so far inland, but pending a more thorough literature search did not mention that there

were no previous Saskatchewan records.<sup>2</sup> Kreba's recent checklist does not include an eider species for the province, even on the hypothetical list, but Smith has since documented the occurrence of a King Eider on Blackstrap Lake.<sup>7 15</sup> The present report adds the Common Eider to the hypothetical list as an unsubstantiated sight record.

Northern Saskatchewan and interior northern Manitoba are still little explored ornithologically, but several species generally associated with Arctic areas are known to occur and even breed far inland.<sup>12 13</sup> The two Common Eiders reported here and a King Eider report for Windy Bay on Nuelin Lake in Keewatin Territory, just north of Manitoba, in 1947 suggest that observers should be alert for inland eiders, although the sedentary nature of the Hudson Bay race of the Common Eider precludes frequent sightings.<sup>11</sup>

The 1979 observation was made while I was working for Beak Consultants Ltd. on a contract with Esso Resources Canada Limited. I am grateful to Wilson Eedy and Don Lush of IEC-Beak and Evan Birchard and Garry J. Mann of Esso Resources for arranging permission to publish the record. C. Stuart Houston deserves special credit for pushing me to get the Saskatchewan record published long before it might have reached the top of my priority list. My five 1969 companions and two 1979 companions made the respective trips both enjoyable and safe.

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# RARE BIRDS NEAR FORT QU'APPELLE, SASKATCHEWAN, 1984

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During 1984 there were a number of unusual birds in the Fort Qu'Appelle area. On 2 April I studied with binoculars a pair of Barrows Goldeneyes at the east end of Echo Lake at about 50 m distance. The oblong cheek-patch on the male was clearly seen. They were with a flock of Common Goldeneyes. The male Barrow's Goldeneye was seen chasing a Common Goldeneye drake away from his mate. Manley Callin in the *Birds of the Qu'Appelle* reported only one other record for the area (a single bird 12 October 1964 at Pasqua Lake).

On 16 May while watching a large flock of shorebirds along a marsh, about 1 km east of Edgeley, I saw two sandpipers that stood back from the shore, away from the Semipalmated, Least, and White-rumped Sandpipers which fed along the water's edge. They remained inactive for about 10 minutes while I watched them with binoculars at a distance of approximately 16 km. The rusty-coloured back, the light, but complete, breast band, and the slightly downturned bill identified them as Western Sandpipers. This is a new record for the Fort Qu'Appelle area. It is a species that has been only reported for Saskatchewan a few times, but it is yet unconfirmed by a specimen or photograph, so it is hypothetical on the Saskatchewan list. I was unaware of this at the time I saw them, or I would have looked up a photographer with a telephoto lens on his camera.

On 6 November Echo Lake froze over (the earliest on record). There were still plenty of ducks in the area. Normally, when this happens, the river is still open, and the ducks spread out along the river. This time it was different. Men had been working on

the PFRA dam at Fort Qu'Appelle and had the river blocked. Because there was no water flowing from Echo Lake the river had frozen over before the lake did. The ducks therefore congregated in front of the fish hatchery, along the south shore of Echo Lake, where a discharge of water kept the lake open in two spots along the shore. Just west of this a crack in the ice had opened up a few feet. The ducks massed together into these three areas. Ten species could be seen at one time. (I saw a total of 20 species of ducks at Echo Lake in 1984 out of the 29 species confirmed for Saskatchewan).

On 7 November I saw a male Barrow's Goldeneye in adult plumage crowded in with the other ducks. While I watched he dove under the water and emerged with a large crayfish in his beak. The other ducks attempted to get his meal away from him. At one point he dropped it and had to dive for it again. He finally managed to swallow it.

On the same day I saw a female Oldsquaw near the base of the crack in the ice. She was in the company of a small flock of Buffleheads. The small size and white head with dark cheek patch were noticed. The tail was pointed, but of normal length, showing that this bird was a female. This is the first record for the Qu'Appelle Valley since 1968. When I returned home and reported that I had seen an Oldsquaw swimming in the cold, November lake water, people gave me some doubtful glances until I explained that it was a duck that I had been watching.

Alice Laing, of Fort Qu'Appelle, went to the area near the fish hatchery on the

following day (8 November) and saw the Barrow's Goldeneye and the Oldsquaw.

During the Christmas Bird Count on 31 of December, I saw a female Three-toed Woodpecker on the trunk of a spruce tree at Fort San. The bird was close, so the bar-

red back and sides were clearly seen. This is the first record of this species for the Qu'Appelle Valley, although there are several records for Regina. It is an example of the many northern birds that have been pushed southward by this winter's extreme weather.

## WINTER AVIAN ANOMALIES, RESTON, MANITOBA

DAVID L. BRADDELL, Box 304, Reston, Manitoba. R0M 1X0

Reston is a village of approximately 600 people in Manitoba only 15 mi. (24 km) east of Saskatchewan and on PTH #2, southwest of Virden, Manitoba. Because it has a well-treed, 4.5-acre park with clumps of spruce, pine and tamarack and many shrubs and other trees, a four-row shelterbelt on the west side, numerous evergreens on private lots, and several birdfeeders, Reston experiences visits from a few boreal and western species of birds that might otherwise bypass the village.

On 23 October 1984 Mr. and Mrs. William Phillips observed a pair of nuthatches that sharply drew the couple's attention. The birds seemed only half the size of the usually seen White-breasted Nuthatches. It was quickly apparent, too, that both birds displayed a blackish line through the

eye and no white stripe above the eye, as on the Red-breasted Nuthatch. As well, the birds' heads were lighter in colour than that of the frequently observed White-breasted Nuthatch. Evidence plainly suggested these had to be Pygmy Nuthatches, typically found in southern B.C. pine woods.

Staying only one day on the Phillips lot, the "pygmies" foiled chances of Manitoba Rare Bird Alert Committee members observing this western pair of visitors. Interestingly enough, only two days previously near gale-force westerlies had crossed this area, possibly bearing the Pygmy Nuthatches through the Crowsnest Pass.

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For two winters now a Buffadee has visited the same Phillips lot. Last year it arrived 4 November and remained in Reston until the second week of February, 1985.



From the side — I had an excellent view of it on three occasions when it visited our kitchen window bird-feeders — the Buffadee looked much like a tiny flying bison, being a Black-capped Chickadee with a very pronounced hump above its curving back, hence the name Buffadee.

As the bird displayed no visible antenna, it seemed most unlikely to be a transistor-implanted chickadee. Larry Bidlake, Regional Field Biologist, Brandon, Manitoba, denied knowledge of any research being conducted with Black-capped Chickades (pers. comm., 9 December 1984). Herb Copland, Curator of Ornithology, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg, echoed Bidlake's point but suggested the bird might have developed a subdermal tumor or cyst (pers. comm., 3 January 1985).

The buffadee appeared to be quite normal, except for its black hump, fraternizing with other chickadees and flying with no apparent hindrance from its dorsal bulge. The bird's occasional visit, however, was novel, even amusing, as the tiny, two-legged bison charged across one's view.

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Another avian oddity, also a second year visitor, was Pegleg, a Ruffed Grouse. Since its first appearance in December 1983, Peg's right foot has been missing; it could only stump along on that side, yet manages well enough in trees or on the ground. What a grip the grouse must have in its left talons!

Pegleg lived on the Burt Pierce lot abutting on the west shelterbelt referred to earlier. The grouse sheltered in one of two tall, heavy-limbed spruces and foraged in two crabapple trees and a long, low lilac hedge at the front and side of the lot.

I spent some time one afternoon watching Peg limping along high snow as he pecked seeds and buds off the lilac hedge. Sympathetic interest and care had caused Peg to become quite tame, allowing Mr.

Pierce to approach within 3-4 feet of this game, one-footed Ruffed Grouse.

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A third eccentric of the avian line-up at Reston was Scruffy, an uncommonly common Redpoll. One of around 40 redpolls, including about 10 Hoary Redpolls, that use birdfeeders in town, Scruffy lived up to his name in possessing a semi-scalped look, with remaining feathers constantly ruffled and unruly, like a backstreet brat's botched brush-cut.

How Scruffy acquired his — or her (let us not be unfeminist!) — scraggly pate is anybody's guess. Did this bird escape the attack of a Northern Shrike or a Screech Owl? Or was Scruffy a peculiarly lucky refugee from a starting snowblower in which the redpoll had sought shelter? The positively frowsy scantness of Scruffy's head feathers suggested the second hypothesis, improbable as it sounds. Nevertheless, this redpoll was healthily active, apparently none the worse for its encounter of the third kind.

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More uncommon than eccentric were the four crossbills that dropped into Reston 6 March 1985. First seen by Gladys Mason at her birdfeeder on the east side of town were a rusty-reddish male, an immature male in blotchy plumage, and an olive-grey female White-winged Crossbill. Then on 9 March our kitchen window feeder tray was successively visited by a female Red Crossbill and a female White-winged Crossbill. By 10 March all four birds visited the William Phillips birdfeeder or foraged in nearby spruce trees.

Skilled and efficient as crossbills are in using their specialized bills to extract seeds from evergreen cones, these interesting and colorful birds are almost clumsy when trying to extract the meat from a small sunflower seed. I have seen a crossbill use, as a final resort, the chickadee's method of holding the seed under a talon but using its bill as a pick rather than a hammer. As the soldier said to Dr. Zhivago in the film, "Adapt or you fail."

# ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF ASSINIBOINE PARK, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

MARTIN K. McNICHOLL, Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario. N0E 1M0

When I first started to watch birds seriously, one of my favourite winter outings was a trip by bus to Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba, usually meeting my aunt Gertrude McNicholl, en route. Later, during my high school days, I enjoyed Saturday morning bird identification classes conducted by the Natural History Society of Manitoba (now known as the Manitoba Naturalists Society). For these reasons, I was especially delighted to learn that a checklist of the park and nearby Assiniboine Forest had been published.<sup>1</sup> In general, this list appears to be thorough, with several rarities

seen during our bird classes included. However, a review of my notes showed three species not on the published list, and one seasonal extension that can be made.

### White-winged Scoter

During one of the NHSM bird walks, the party led by veteran Winnipeg birder, Gordon Smith, spotted a male White-winged Scoter on the Assiniboine River where it flows through the park. In addition to Smith and I, my notes indicate that it was seen by Ken Johanneson, John Rudd, and "others."



*Hawk Owl*

*Wayne Lynch*



**Northern Hawk-Owl**

In November 1962 my father, the late Archie McNicholl, returned from work one day to say he had seen an unusual owl in Assiniboine Park. At that time, he taught school in Charleswood and the park was on his favourite route between school and our Valour Road home. He tentatively identified the bird from my field guides as a Northern Hawk-Owl, and another check the next day convinced him. Although he would not consider himself an active birder, he enjoyed taking my anunt and I on bird outings until I was old enough to drive, and thereafter still came along frequently. Consequently he was familiar with most common species. My neighbour, Ken Johanneson and I saw the bird on 24 November and again on 2 January 1963, when we showed it to the late Dr. Harold Popham. My father saw it frequently that winter, and Mossop mentions that it was seen by several people during the Christmas bird count that year, and records an observation on an unstated date by E. Bendit.<sup>2</sup> This is the bird that Smith mentions as present in “west Winnipeg” from 14 November to 23 February, as one of 10 records of the species in Manitoba that winter.<sup>5</sup>

**Black-backed Woodpecker**

The checklist includes the Black-backed Woodpecker as irregular in fall. A female observed by Byron Paulson, Jr. and I near the duck pond on 5 January 1963 adds winter to this species’ occurrence.

**Boreal Chickadee**

The most surprising omission from the list is Boreal Chickadee, as the cedars near the English Gardens and the feeders of Superintendent Hector MacDonald were generally stated as the place to look for these birds in Winnipeg by the birding fraternity during my formative years. I recall various frustrating attempts to find them there after various friends and relatives had

seen them a few days or hours earlier. I finally did see them with David Hatch, Andy Heidrick, Harold Hosford, and the late Perry Silverman on 16 November 1963. Ken Johanneson and I saw one on 1 March 1964 and two or three on 29 March. Mossop mentioned seeing them near the duck pond on 6 December 1963, a winter when MacDonald had mentioned them as regularly around.<sup>3</sup> In 1966, he mentioned that there had been no recent reports there after being regular “each winter” at MacDonald’s feeder.<sup>4</sup> This was slightly before any of the three compilers of the checklist were active in the province, probably explaining why they were not aware of the former status of this chickadee in the park. Their disappearance coincided rather closely with MacDonald’s retirement, after which the feeders were not maintained, at least for the next few winters.

No doubt this very accessible and productive park will remain a favourite of Winnipeg birders for many years, and additional species can be expected. Holland, Koes and Krieger have done local and visiting observers a real service in compiling the list.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MOSSOP, H. 1963 The Boreal Chickadee. Chickadee Notes No. 465 Winnipeg Free Press, 14 December 1963.

<sup>4</sup> MOSSOP, H. 1966 Birds with odd colorings. Chickadee Notes No. 618 Winnipeg Free Press, 5 November 1966.

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# DO HUMMINGBIRDS FOLLOW SAPSUCKERS TO FOOD SOURCES?

RICHARD W. KNAPTON, Department of Biological Sciences, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2S 3A1 RALPH V. CARTAR and JOHN D. REYNOLDS, Department of Biology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.



*Hummingbird feeding at sapsucker drills*

*Anonymous*

Feeding on tree sap by hummingbirds has been widely reported, especially at holes drilled by sapsuckers.<sup>1</sup> This is especially important for the Ruby-throated Hummingbird in its northern distribution in Canada; the hummingbird often arrives in spring before food plants have appeared, and it occurs during the breeding season in habitats in which food plants may be scarce or unavailable.<sup>2</sup> The primary source of food

is most likely sucrose in sap from trees drilled by sapsuckers,<sup>2</sup> and indeed some Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are thought to specialize on tree sap and rarely take flower nectar.<sup>3</sup> Such individuals could locate food sources by searching for drilled holes or by following sapsuckers to feeding sites. In this note, we report instances of hummingbirds following and maintaining close association with sapsuckers.



We made the observations at Algonquin Provincial Park, Nipissing District, Ontario, in 1980. On 30 May, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird was seen flying across a clearing close behind a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at 8:13 p.m. The sapsucker landed about 1 m above ground on a White Birch, and moved up the birch for about 2 m. The hummingbird hovered near the sapsucker for the first 1 m of ascent, then perched for the rest of the ascent, keeping about 0.5 m away at all times. The sapsucker, with the hummingbird in close attendance, next flew 20 m to a White Spruce and landed 2 m above ground. The woodpecker spent about a minute working its way about 4 m up the trunk of the spruce, then flew 5 m to another White Spruce, alighting 6 m above ground. It progressed 10 m up the trunk in about 3 minutes, then left the tree and flew out of sight. The hummingbird kept within 0.5 m of the sapsucker at all times, whether the sapsucker was foraging or in flight. While the sapsucker foraged on the spruces, the hummingbird flew from perch to perch, zigzagging from one side of the tree to the other, always maintaining close attendance. The two birds flew out of sight together.

A similar event was observed 10 km away at 12:00 p.m. on 7 June. A female Ruby-throated Hummingbird followed a sapsucker closely for about 3 minutes as the sapsucker foraged on, and flew between, several Sugar Maples. The hummingbird perched on twigs close to the sapsucker while the latter was foraging on the tree trunks, immediately left its perch when the sapsucker left the tree, and flew close alongside the sapsucker when the latter was in flight.

The sapsuckers were not observed to drill new holes, and hence we recorded no feeding by the hummingbirds. However, it seems highly plausible that in each case the hummingbirds were indeed following sapsuckers to locate feeding sites.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Bob Montgomerie for discussions and references, Bob Nero for comments on an earlier draft, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for providing facilities at Sasajewan Lake, Algonquin Provincial Park.

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# EGG-BURYING BEHAVIOUR BY A YELLOW WARBLER IN THE APPARENT ABSENCE OF COWBIRD PARASITISM

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Yellow Warblers frequently bury their eggs in response to Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism.<sup>2</sup> From their observations of naturally parasitized nests in which the host's and cowbird's eggs were both buried, Clark and Robertson concluded that egg burial is caused directly by the presence of cowbird eggs and is an anti-parasite adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Rothstein believed that other factors may be influential such as inclement weather or a response to any item alien to the Yellow Warbler.<sup>4</sup>

While studying the breeding biology of the Yellow Warbler near Delta, Manitoba I observed a Yellow Warbler nest in which egg-burying behaviour occurred in the apparent absence of Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism.<sup>3</sup> The nest was discovered 31 May 1976, 7.8 m high in a Manitoba Maple (*Acer negundo*). Eggs from the two sets observed in the nest were marked with a felt pen and the nest was inspected daily until it failed 28 June.

When first found, the nest contained a single egg. Two additional eggs were laid over the next two days. No loss of eggs was noted until 9 June, when only one egg remained. The nest structure was undisturbed and I observed a female Yellow Warbler nearby. By 11 June, additional nest material had been added to the top and inside lining of the nest, partially covering the warbler egg. The lining appeared complete on the following day. On 13 June the first egg of a four-egg clutch was laid in the new nest bowl. Eggs disappeared singly on 18

and 19 June and on 26 June the nest contained only one nestling and the other egg or nestling had disappeared. Two days later, the nestling was missing and the nest partially destroyed. I felt the nest for eggs, but found none.

Generally, Yellow Warblers in this population laid five-egg clutches during the first part of the breeding season<sup>3</sup> and the presence of three eggs in the first set may suggest one or two eggs were lost. It is not known if the first set was incubated or if another female took over the nest after egg laying and carried out the burial behaviour. Additionally, since single eggs can be removed by a predator, it is possible that parasitism occurred at the nest without my knowledge and the cowbird egg and possibly a Yellow Warbler egg(s) were removed by a predator or disappeared from some other cause.

The observation of egg burial in the apparent absence of cowbird parasitism was not witnessed in any of the other 121 unparasitized Yellow Warbler nests that I found before the last egg had been laid and in which at least one egg hatched;<sup>3</sup> however, egg burial of Yellow Warbler eggs was noted in 11% (9/82) of parasitized nests in which at least one Yellow Warbler egg had been laid. Burial of Yellow Warbler eggs in the absence of parasitism may have occurred more frequently than observed, since not all nests were found before clutch initiation. However, since burial in the present case occurred well into the incubation

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stage and if burial of Yellow Warbler eggs in unparasitized nests occurs during incubation, the probability of observing this occurrence in other nests should have been greater. Based on my observation and the lack of published records, egg burial in the absence of cowbird parasitism in Yellow Warblers must be considered rare. Although the present observation supports Rothstein's suggestion that factors other than parasitism may cause egg burial, the rarity of this event and the more frequent occurrence of Yellow Warbler egg burial in parasitized nests lends greater support to Clark and Robertson's hypothesis that egg burial is an anti-parasite adaptation.

### Acknowledgments

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*Aspen stand, Prince Albert National Park.*

*K. Strange*



# NORTHERN ORIOLE

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The arrival in mid-May of the male Northern (Baltimore) Oriole at Whytefold (on the southwest corner of Lake Winnipeg) is made known by its loud and clear liquid call of peter-peter-peter and its flaming orange and black plumage.

A few days later the female, in more subdued tones arrives and courtship begins. As soon as I am aware of their joyful presence I hang two orange halves in basket-like fashion from the lower branch of a tree in order to attract them to our property. In anticipation of nest building I scatter about the yard 15-cm lengths of white string, separated twine, bits of colored yarn and clumps of fluffy cotton from the clothes dryer.

It is generally the first week in June when construction of the nest begins. Then comes the exciting time — watching to see which female picks up what and where she will fly. I have never at any time seen the male pick up any material, nor help construct the nest. In fact, the female does not permit him to do so; she is very aggressive and is determined to build the nest entirely by herself.<sup>2</sup> However Liz Roley reported that a male Baltimore picked up materials and “delivered them to the weaver” at the nesting site.<sup>7</sup> Various observers note that the female does all the building, while the male keeps her close company and gives his chatter-call from a branch close by.<sup>6 8</sup>

In 1977 when I first scattered materials for nest building one female picked up only bits of cotton fluff.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion a female pulled out one long human hair from a small clump of fluff on the lawn and flew off with it to weave it into the nest. By 1981 there was a noticeable increase in the use of white string and some colored yarn, except for red.<sup>3</sup>

A few years ago an unusual cup-like nest was built in an oak tree, woven mainly of very narrow plastic strips and lined with fibrous material.<sup>1</sup> In 1984 another variation was observed in nest construction. One female picked up various colors, including red, and flew to the top of one of our old oak trees where she constructed a “patch-work” nest. This particular female had plumage coloration similar to a Bullock’s Oriole (since Bullock’s and Baltimore orioles hybridize freely they are now classed as one species, the Northern Oriole).

In our area the Northern Oriole is attracted mainly to tall aspens which are just commencing to burst forth in fresh green but, among the many nests I have observed, a few have been built in Oak or Manitoba Maple trees. The nest is usually an intricately woven hanging pouch about 9 to 20 cm deep and anywhere from 2 to 18 m above the ground.<sup>5</sup> It is fascinating to watch the female use her bill like a darning needle. First she weaves a single fibre in and out and fastens it securely to her chosen twig(s). The nest stands out as a work of architectural art in the bird world. It may take from 4.5 to 8 days to complete the nest. It is entered from the top.<sup>5</sup> The upper part is somewhat transparent; the bottom is a thick mass and is lined with fine grasses and cotton fluff. The nest is made to withstand the assaults of fierce wind and rain. In many instances old nests remain on a tree for several years.

This year the nest most closely observed was in a Manitoba Maple in a small clump of mixed woods between a road and a cottage. On 4 June 1984 the female oriole was seen weaving a nest in an overhanging bough 3 m from the ground. On 9 June the nest appeared to be completed. It was constructed mainly of plant fibres and a few



pieces of white string, was pensile, and at least 12.5 cm deep. Two days later the female commenced to sit; the male was singing close by. On 15 June when I ventured close to the nest site the male gave his warning call. On 23 June I observed the female fly off the nest; the male flew close to it to keep watch, but did not enter it. The female then returned. Only the female incubated. I was not able to count the eggs but literature reports indicate clutch size is 4-6 and that the incubation period is 12-14 days.<sup>5</sup>

On 24 June the male flew to the nest with a spider in his beak and fed the nestlings. A few minutes later the female took a turn, and then brooded. Neither bird ever flew directly to the nest; they were very cautious and if the call of another species was heard close by either male or female would perch for several minutes a few feet from the nest and when danger was past, would work their way among the leaves to the nest to feed the nestlings.

I continued visiting the nest site frequently but it was not until 30 June when both male and female were making trips with insects to the nest, that I was able to see one tiny beak through the thin upper part of the nest. On 2 July two tiny necks stretched up. Two days later there was much movement in the nest and I saw three nestlings. Early the next day the female sang before she went to the nest with a cankerworm.<sup>8</sup>

Fishflies (mayflies) were now in abundance, so that food was plentiful. On 5 July two young flapped their wings and then moved out of the nest. At that time three young necks stretched up for food. It was now apparent that there were five young.

There was continuous activity at the nest site; numerous calls came from young and adults on 6 July. In fact, during my three visits that day, the young orioles never stopped calling, unless warned by the adults that danger was near. Early the next day all was quiet — the nest was empty!

During the first 2 weeks in July, throughout the neighborhood the air becomes alive with the repetitive calls of young orioles — tee-dee-dee-tee-dee-dee. They seek refuge in bushes and treed areas, where they are fed by the parents until they can fend for themselves.

The Northern Oriole is one of our most colorful and valuable birds, due to its huge consumption of all kinds of insects. In this area it also eats Saskatoon berries and has been seen taking nectar at hummingbird feeders.

The Whytewold region on Lake Winnipeg appears to be a favorite breeding ground for the Northern Oriole. We feel very fortunate to have such large numbers of this very attractive species return every summer!

<sup>1</sup> BANCROFT, J. 1978. Variations in bird nesting habits. *Blue Jay* 36 (2):120.

<sup>2</sup> BANCROFT, J. 1978. "Talk about Women's Lib!" *Purple Martin News*, Griggsville, Ill., U.S.A. (December 1978).

<sup>3</sup> BANCROFT, J. 1982. Further observations of variations in bird nesting habits. *Blue Jay* 40(2):126-127.

<sup>4</sup> BENT, A.C. 1960. *Bent's life histories of North American birds*. Vol. 2 H.H. Collins, Jr., Ed. Harper Bros., N.Y. 374 pp.

<sup>5</sup> HARRISON, H.H. 1975. *A field guide to birds' nests in the United States east of the Mississippi River*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 257 pp.

<sup>6</sup> ROBERTS, T.S. 1932. *Birds of Minnesota Vol. 2* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. 821 pp.

<sup>7</sup> ROLEY, L. 1983. *Nature Notes*. The Leader-Post, 25 June 1983. Regina, Saskatchewan.

<sup>8</sup> STOKES, D.W. & L.Q. STOKES. 1983. *A guide to bird behavior*. Vol. 2 Little Brown & Co., Boston and Toronto. 334 pp.

<sup>9</sup> UDVARDY, M.D.F. 1977. *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American birds, western region*. A.A. Knopf, N.Y. 853 pp.

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# JUNIOR NATURALISTS

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## COME BACK SWIFT FOX

GILLIAN RICHARDSON, 2450 Crowe Bay, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4V 0V7

When you read that another animal or bird has become *extinct*, you know it's too late — they're gone from the earth forever. Many animals are *endangered*, or *threatened*. It may be difficult to save them. Now, help is on the way for a small, prairie fox, the Swift Fox, that was *extirpated*. That means it is no longer found in the Canadian wild, even though it still lives in other places.

Back when the pioneer farmers were settling the west, these sturdy little animals roamed the open grasslands. But the cat-sized fox was killed off by mistake — it ate the poison and stepped into the traps meant for coyotes and wolves, who were considered to be pests. Luckily for us, some Swift Foxes continued to live in parts of the mid-western United States. Today, a program is underway to bring it back to Canada.

The Swift Fox is about half the size of its cousin, the Red Fox. Its coarse coat is mostly grey, with shades of tan and cream on the underside and legs. It has a bushy tail, tipped with black. Its large, pointed ears stand straight up. Dark patches show on each side of its sharp muzzle.

At the Wildlife Reserve of Western Canada in Cochrane, Alberta, pairs of captive foxes, brought from the United States, raised the pups that would be set free at well chosen sites in the Canadian prairies. The first were released in Alberta in 1983, more in southwestern Saskatchewan last

spring [1984]. A third group may soon have a new home in Manitoba. If the foxes choose to stay, they will be back in their natural grassland homes after almost 50 years!

To make sure the foxes feel at home, the people working on the program created a network of tunnels and boxes to closely imitate the kind of den it likes. They enclosed the dens inside a fence, hoping the foxes would stay for the fall and winter months.

They were fed and watched carefully. If all went according to plan, there would be new fox pups in spring. The animals would then be freed to do their own night-time hunting, for the mice, gophers, small birds, insects and reptiles that are plentiful in the prairies in spring.

Usually 4 or 5 pups are born to the Swift Fox some time in April. The male does the hunting for the first few weeks, while the family remains in the den. On sunny days, when they are about one month old, the pups will play outside. Pups and parents stay together for most of the summer, but once the young foxes have learned to hunt on their own, they go off to find their own dens.

Unlike most stories, this one will be best if there is no ending. For now, there are more questions than answers. Did enough pups survive the first year? Will some foxes remain to use the dens again? How many may have been lost to the arctic-like, winter



cold, or to hunters, or even run over on the highways as they searched far and wide for food? Will they find safe places to shelter on the wide open, wind-blown prairie they used to love?

Perhaps the biggest question is whether the Canadian government is concerned enough to keep providing money for programs like this one. You may be able to help persuade the Minister of the Environment of its importance by suggesting to your class

at school that they write to Ottawa. It's too late for any of us to see a Passenger Pigeon, but at least the Swift Fox is still alive. It deserves a chance to regain its rightful home, so that, maybe, some day, your children will see one!

The Swift Fox will have to use not only its speed, as its name suggests, but all of its strength and cunning to make it. Maybe, with lots of help from its human friends, it might be back — to stay!



*Swift Fox*

*Andrius Valadka*



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# NATURE LIBRARY

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## NEST BUILDING AND BIRD BEHAVIOR

N.E. COLLIAS and E.C. COLLIAS. 1984. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 336 pp. 64 b/w photos, 14 drawings, 2 appendices. Hardcover \$45.00, softcover \$16.50 (U.S. funds).

When a bird builds a nest it makes a more or less permanent record of its behavior - "frozen behavior". The type of nest built gives us important insights into the life of each species and clues to the birds ecological and evolutionary relationships. This book is promoted as the first comprehensive review of the scattered technical literature on this subject, one of the most critical periods in a bird's life.

Nest building behavior and nest types are examined in relation to attracting and keeping a mate; the breeding cycle; adapting to the stresses of the physical environment, competitors and predators; the special problems related to gregarious and colonial nesting. Unfortunately only 65 species of Saskatchewan birds are included and most of these are treated in a superficial manner by giving only meagre details about their nests and behavior. The authors rely heavily on their own studies of weaverbirds (Ploceidae) to explain how birds build their nests and how this ability develops. The bird families of the world and their nest types are listed in one appendix; sources of good photographs of bird nests are listed in the second.

If you are interested in this central aspect of bird biology you will find this book an important first source of academic information. — Reviewed by *Philip S. Taylor*, 1714 Prince of Wales Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7K 3E5

## THE BIRDWATCHER'S COMPANION — An encyclopedic handbook of North American birdlife

CHRISTOPHER LEAHY, illustrated by GORDON MORRISON. 1982 Hill and Wang, New York, 917 pp. \$38.95 (Canadian)

If the birders unable to articulate plausible reasons for their interest in birds, on a recent television program, had read Timothy Leahy's compendium, they would have had ready answers. As Leahy says, "looking at birds seems to yield equal pleasure at all levels of expertise."

Leahy provides a well-written, entertaining, informative overview of ornithology, with a strong historical and literary slant. There are delightful essays on birds in human imagination, and in human culture, including a list of the best poems about birds. There are comprehensive essays of 4 to 17 pages each on topics such as banding, bird feeding, bird houses, care of distressed birds, colour, conservation, display, distribution, endangered birds, evolution, falconry, flight, food, introduced birds, migrations, molt, names, navigation, nests, pests, size, sleep, song, speciation, swimming/diving, taxonomy, territory, and vision. Any one of these could have been submitted to *Scientific American* or *Audubon*.

The inquisitive will have many of their questions answered. How do crossbills open an unripe pine cone? How does an owl achieve silent flight? How does a hummingbird hover and fly backwards and where does it get the energy? How does a vulture cool off? Which passerine species walk rather than hop?



Some of the items are reminiscent of the *Guinness Book of Records*: The Elephant Bird of Madagascar laid 2-gallon eggs; a Pelican's pouch holds 3 gallons of water; there are 25,216 contour feathers in a Whistling Swan; a Bald Eagle nest may weigh 2 tons; a Gray Jay can stand 8 seconds on a red-hot stove; a Griffin Vulture may ascend to 36,000 feet; a Peregrine can fly 1350 miles in 24 hours; a swan may be flightless for 7 weeks while molting; male bird semen contains up to 3 million spermatozoa per ejaculation. There are helpful notes on pronunciation and an excellent bibliography to guide further study.

This book is not only an invaluable reference source for any teacher or writer, but it is written with verve and is really fun to browse in. I found only a few errors. If you don't buy a copy, you must at least borrow one. — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

## THE WORLD OF ROBERT BATEMAN

ROBERT BATEMAN. 1985. 85 full-colour paintings with artist's commentaries. For release in October. \$49.00 from Nature Canada Bookshop, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario. K1P 6G1

## WILDERNESS WAYS: SASKATCHEWAN POEMS

By the late TOM WHITE.  
38 pp., paper \$3.50.

Pamela White has made this volume of 36 poems from the pen of her late husband available to members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society through The Blue Jay Bookshop, P.O. Box 1121, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3B4. Reading these four-line rhyming poems one is struck anew by Tom's sensitivity for the land and the wild ones of Saskatchewan, and his scorn for their despoilers. It is a book we all need. Proceeds will be added to our Conservation Fund. Tom White is the author of SNHS Special Publication 14, SASKATCHEWAN COURGAR: ELUSIVE CAT, price \$5.00 (paper).

## THE SPIRIT OF THE HUCKLEBERRY; SENSUOUSNESS IN HENRY THOREAU

VICTOR CARL FRIESEN. 1984. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. 145 pp. Notes.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) is a writer familiar to many readers of the *Blue Jay* for his having written *Walden* (1854), a journal, and many well-known sentences and phrases, the origin of which may be unknown or forgotten, such as "In short, all good things are wild and free," "hears a different drummer" and "in wildness is the preservation of the world." Friesen has re-read all of Thoreau's writings to write this study (a revision of work he did for his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees) on the sensuous qualities of Thoreau's prose which he believes account for the essential Thoreau.

Friesen became acquainted with Thoreau's work while living in a small teacherage near Fort Carlton and feeling himself surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature, much as Thoreau had been amidst nature in and near Concord, Massachusetts. His interest in the lover of huckleberries has not diminished; however, it may culminate in this affectionate study. He quotes often, perhaps too often because many of the brief quotations are annoying interpolations which add nothing to Friesen's text (e.g. "very good," and "ovation").

Thoreau found that his greatest immersion in nature occurred in swamps and in some passages about them can be found appeals to the five common senses of man. But most often his sentences appeal to one or two senses, as in this one from *Walden*: "When I made most noise he [a Barred Owl] would stretch out his neck, and erect his neck feathers, and open his eyes wide; but their lids soon fell again, and he began to nod." Friesen reminds us that Thoreau was a better botanist than ornithologist, notwithstanding the previous sentence and the fact that the "Peterson" system of bird identification based on color pattern and outline originates with Thoreau and not Ernest T. Seton.

The claims for Thoreau's sensuousness are persuasive, and besides style Friesen discusses briefly his economic views and scientific interests, and that cornerstone of Thoreau's philosophy: simplicity. Friesen's use of the present tense is an apt reminder that the writings are as vital today as they were in the nineteenth century. His straightforward declarative sentences help him to make his points clearly. Alas, neither he nor his editor saw fit to provide an index to this brief, attractive book. You will need the 1906 edition of *Walden* to pursue Friesen's references to Thoreau's work.

There is a new edition of Thoreau's writings which may interest you, now being published by Princeton University Press.

As well, there is the informative, entertaining *Annotated Walden* (Bramhall House, 1970) and the biography by Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (Dover, 1970), to add to Friesen's book, if you wish to renew (or begin) a familiarity with this man who found great pleasure in spending time in the summer going huckleberrying. Thoreau took satisfaction in his belief that "there can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still." — Reviewed by Marshall Gilliland, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0K1

## BLACK WOLF: THE LIFE OF ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

Betty Keller of Langley, British Columbia, has written "a perceptive and insightful biography of this colourful eccentric who once played so large a part in the lives of North American boys", as the dust cover correctly states. Keller has done her homework. The book is well written and thoroughly researched.

She has chosen appropriate material from Seton's own autobiography, *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist*, from his second wife's *By a Thousand Fires*, from John Henry Wadland's scholarly thesis, and from numerous archival sources. She deserves great credit for her sleuthing, especially for unearthing the unpublished manuscripts of Seton's brothers, William S. Thompson and Dr. Arthur S. Thompson, written respectively in 1923 and 1940.

Seton was an unusually talented man with a complex personality. Keller deals openly and fairly with his idiosyncrasies, spinning a life story of unusual interest. Seton had a life-long hatred of his father, but from his brothers' unpublished writings and other sources, it is clear that this was inappropriately exaggerated by Seton's vivid imagination. Seton's second wife



described him as “a strange combination of exact scientist and imaginative romancer”.

Seton was one of the most successful authors and public lecturers of his time. His animal stories, a composite of his own observations, became runaway best sellers, and are still favorites today. As an artist, he not only illustrated his own books with delightful sketches, but published *Studies in the Art Anatomy of Animals*, contributed 1000 drawings to the *Century Encyclopedia*, and illustrated Frank M. Chapman's *Bird Life*.

Seton was also a scientist, yet Keller's foreward frankly disavows any attempt to explore Seton's “place in the scientific world”. In spite of this disclaimer, Keller does an adequate job of recognizing the importance of, and the recognition given, Seton's two-volume *Life Histories of Northern Mammals* in 1909 and his four volume *Lives of Game Animals* in 1925-28. She should have offered the reader another paragraph or two to explain the importance of Seton's unrivalled legacy of bird distribution records as southern Manitoba was first being settled, and the changes in the next ten years. Seton's writings, after all, offer us the best documentation now available for the disappearance of the Passenger Pigeon, the influx of the Mourning dove, Greater Prairie Chicken and Eastern Bluebird with settlement, and the rapid decline of the Upland Sandpiper and Sprague's Pipit as land was broken by the plough. He rescued from oblivion the important bird notes of George F. Guernsey of Fort Qu'Appelle and found the first-ever nest of the Philadelphia Vireo near his homestead within what is now Saskatchewan.

Seton's Woodcraft Indians grew to 100,000 members in eight years, in spite of a loose and inefficient organization. His woodcraft program was incorporated without adequate acknowledgement into Robert Baden-Powell's book, *Scouting for Boys*. In spite of the fact that the Woodcraft Indians continued alongside the Boy Scouts for a few years, Seton was for five years the

Chief Scout of the new movement in the United States. Keller also tells us of Seton's dealings with other important figures including Theodore Roosevelt and John Burroughs. She describes his interesting trip to the subarctic beyond Great Slave Lake in 1907 with E. A. Preble.

Keller does not inform us of the attempt by Seton and Miller Christy to publish the Andrew Graham — Thomas Hutchins 1770's manuscript of bird observations at Hudson Bay, nor does she note the strange fact that Seton's death was ignored by the *Journal of Mammalogy* whereas an appreciative obituary was published in *The Auk*. She is incorrect in stating that *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist* was not republished after the war; I own a copy of the 1946 printing.

This attractive book is appropriately illustrated and almost free from typographical errors. Not only is it a “good read,” but it is now the definitive biography of one of the most interesting naturalists of all time. — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

## THE NORTHERN NATURALIST

E. OTTO HOHN 1983 Lone Pine Media Productions Limited, 440, 10113-104 Street, Edmonton. 173 pp. 33 photos, 2 maps. \$12.50

With the title and an aspen leaf in silver on its forest green cover, this book is physically very attractive. While the layout is generally good, one obvious design flaw is the main map; on it the small area described in the text is almost lost in the binding. The photographs are in general quite ordinary and few are clear; they add little to the verbal content. I also have reservations about the text — reluctantly, because, especially for parkland readers, the topics discussed are likely of immediate personal interest.

Hohn's naturalist credentials are impeccable. Birdwatcher since childhood and 25-year owner of a small acreage in the Cooking Lake moraine country east of Edmonton, Hohn knows the "Cooking Lake Uplands" well. Though this is already a small area, Hohn limits his scope still further by describing only the species he finds "most interesting." For transient species, he reminisces also about his experiences in the Arctic and Alaska, in England and South America. The result is that, while the anecdotes and asides are usually interesting, an already loose narrative meanders through a random mixture of historical, geographical and biographical details. Hohn's major writing problem here is his lack of variation in pacing or style, and despite its promise, the book is never hard to put down.

In the first section, "Sketches of Some Animals," the author describes mostly his own varied experiences. He is at his most vivid here and the reader does catch his enthusiasm. The second section, "Wildlife Through the Year," is divided into four seasonal "chapters," and one indeed expects these pages to follow the annual cycle. Hohn begins with Horned Lark, Ruffed and Sharp-tailed grouse — reasonable choices — and carries on with partridge and pheasant, but ties neither of the latter to spring at all. Golden Eagle is not even treated here in its relation to Alberta but rather to the Arctic, and where it fits into Cooking Lake's spring is not clear. "Summer" abounds in references to migration, to "mid-April" and "spring," and the same inconsistencies continue throughout fall and winter.

I do not quarrel with the contents of these species descriptions in themselves, for Hohn's casual, anecdotal, and generally competent if somewhat soporific style does make for relaxed and easy reading. But, why not dispense with the seasonal distinctions and use some other arrangement entirely — a daily or weekly journal form, for example, where the seasons need be only

as important as events make them and where the reader's expectations are mostly met?

What becomes a continuously distracting feature of this otherwise innocuous book is the large number of errors. They begin early, on the page containing Hohn's biography, and continue in abundance to the last page. Page 16 for example, has five errors in two paragraphs, and the three-page index contains at least 38 easily-found errors and/or major inconsistencies. Some, (e.g. kingfisher, billed — the correct name is Belted Kingfisher) spelling errors and wrong page numbers are obviously proofing failures, mostly revealing someone's carelessness. Incorrect names such as "gopher, Richardson's ground squirrel," "duck, goldeneye" and "warbler, yellow-throated common" blend with incomplete ones like "avocet," "dowitcher" and "pelican" and names which are accurate. The resulting mix leaves a naive reader with no idea of the correct names of the animals mentioned.

Hohn's bird names are particularly annoying. He professes to use the "American Ornithologist's Union's" 1982 'official' vernacular names as his reference for "new names," but provides only an incomplete tabulation of those names for species included — for which he uses only the old names in his text. And, his failure to follow the common practice of capitalizing English species names makes it difficult to find birds' names on a page.

Reminiscences theoretically form a logical base for this type of book, but it is important that one gets a sense of the significance of events. In this book, at least for this reader, that does not happen. The book is aptly named — it is the naturalist himself who is best revealed. Nature remains stubbornly in the shadows. — Reviewed by *Mary D. Gilliland*, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0K1



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# LETTERS

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## A TASTE FOR FOWL

On going out to do the chores the morning of 11 January, 1985 I found one of our domestic geese minus its head and neck. I first thought that it had died and that the dogs had been eating it but the racket of several magpies prompted me to look about. On a pine tree behind the grain bins a Great Horned Owl was roosting. With binoculars I observed blood on its breast feathers and a white downy feather stuck near one eye. I assumed it was the culprit.

For the next three days the owl perched on a tree near the barn or chicken house and was observed feeding on the goose carcass even in daylight. We locked the geese in the barn at night.

On 15 January our dogs stole the remains of the goose and the owl was not seen for a few days. The geese were going into the barn at night on their own and we stopped shutting the door.

While it was still dark the morning of the 18th I went out to do the chores. The owl flew out of the barn. I found a second dead goose with head and neck missing. After that we shut the geese in every night. The owl roosted on trees around the yard each day but never bothered geese or chickens outside during the day. We heard it hooting the night of the 21st.

On January 23 we found a 24" square window on the chicken house broken in, wing marks on the snow outside, and two chickens with no heads or necks. Our Great Horned Owl was sitting in a tree near the chicken house. Regretfully we decided three strikes was enough and shot the owl.  
— *Joan Dalziel*, Box 1, Love, Saskatchewan.  
S0J 1P0

## SHOWY LADY'S SLIPPERS — 1943

My brother and I had been cutting cordwood in the swamp during the 1930's; I wanted to know what the low place in the swamp was like in the summer. The last Saturday in June 1943 I went. When about 500 feet from the low spot I could see whitish. Ice? Couldn't be! Water, maybe. Coming quite close I recognized it as flowers. WOW! But there were so many, in the thousands; 200 feet ahead, about that much to the right and to the left. Two acres or more a solid mass of white — more than two hay racks full. I could not believe what I was seeing; was not dreaming for I was in the swamp. I plucked some and hurried home.

At home I told my two sisters to go to see something they had never seen before. We have seen both the small and large Yellow Lady's-slipper but not the Showy as they grow in the swamp or bog. Reasons for not going to the swamp in summer are many: humidity very high, hard to walk, mosquitoes, and many flies of about half a dozen species.

On Sunday my sisters arrived with enough plants to fill a galvanized tub. Two lady school teachers who were driving around the district bidding farewell to the families stopped and stayed for a half hour admiring the beautiful flowers. They thought that they were all pulled out, but not so for there was the two acres left for no one to see. No wonder the name "Showy." — *Lewis Wojciechowski*, R.R. 1, Lac Du Bonnet, Manitoba. R0E 1A0



*Showy Lady's-slipper*

*Lawrence Baschak*



## NATURE NOTES FROM SOUTHEY

I am a long time subscriber of the *Blue Jay* and have, in years gone by, sent in some nature news to the magazine.

This spring I have had the pleasure of observing several unusual occurrences on our old homestead now farmed by our son. This farm is situated not far from Raymore, south on No. 6 Highway about 18 miles, then 2 miles east on the grid road and south about a mile. No one is there now except for farm operations during the farming season, so it is quiet and fairly secluded with a good windbreak surrounding the yard.

On the Easter weekend some of our family paid a visit to the farm and were greeted by an excited pair of Merlins which had evidently set up housekeeping in an old magpie's nest. I had just previously had the good fortune to see a pair of Merlins on the 20 block Lorne Street in Regina, my first sighting of this bird. Having heard and read how scarce they are, you can imagine my surprise to find them at our farm where I had lived for over thirty years without seeing one in all that time. Surprisingly, there is also a pair of magpies nesting within a few yards of the Merlin's nest and a pair of crows appear to have a nest farther along. All these nests are high up in spruce trees and, therefore, rather difficult to observe. We hope the Merlins are able to hold their own against the crows and magpies.

On a subsequent visit to the farm on May 28th, I was in for another surprise. When I was trying to get a good look at the Merlins, a fairly large bird flew from high up in another spruce tree on the other side of the windbreak. It looked like a Mallard duck. Sure enough, there was a nest high up amongst the evergreen boughs, perhaps

an old crow's nest. I have since verified that it is, indeed, a Mallard duck nesting up there. About twenty years ago, I found a pintail duck nesting in an abandoned crow's nest in a willow tree on the edge of a slough not far from this same site. She nested there for a couple of years, and raised one clutch of ducklings, but crows found the nest and eggs the second year.

A few days ago [letter 5 May 1985], I was again out at the farm and wandering through the windbreak away from these nesting birds; I was again startled when a bird flew from a low evergreen branch quite close to me and settled on a poplar branch a few yards ahead of me in the bluff. Fortunately, I had my field glasses with me and was able to identify it as a screech owl, another first for my list of birds over the years.

For several springs now, a pair of robins have set up housekeeping on the seat of a tractor sitting out in the yard at the farm. They are back again this spring. What to do when the men need the tractor? The nest has been moved to the top of a barrel close by the tractor and protected by plywood and the robin has continued to nest. I believe magpies found the nest last year. We are faced again with having to move the nest so that the tractor can be used!

So much for these very interesting birds and their habits!

Last fall the S.N.H.S. sent a letter out regarding the Burrowing Owl and I have this to report rather belatedly. Perhaps about twenty years ago there were Burrowing Owls on the SW33-23-17W2nd. Since then it has been excavated for gravel for the municipality and ruined for the Burrowing Owls. I have never seen any in recent years. — *Gertrude B. Hillier*, Box 351, Southey, Saskatchewan. S0G 4P0

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# MEMBERS VIEWPOINTS

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## A SASKATCHEWAN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

In the last issue of the *Blue Jay* there was an insert advertising a part-time office manager position, which I think is great if the SNHS can afford it without jeopardizing its conservation activities. The point to which I took objection is that the position was advertised as being in either Saskatoon or Regina. I thought we had a Saskatchewan Natural History Society, not a Saskatoon-Regina Natural History Society. I did some quick checking (nothing statistically valid or random) with some of the current executive and found that some of the reasons for this restriction on location were of questionable significance (cheaper for the society, closer to political scene, etc.) to the society, others were down-right self-centered. But, the question is, do we still have a *Saskatchewan* NHS which truly reflects the opinions and thoughts of Saskatchewan Naturalists. I checked the inside back covers of the *Blue Jay* and found that I had to go all the way back to 1964 to find a truly rural president (i.e. one that did not work or live in an urban centre), Steve Mann. Since that time the *officers* of this society have read like a Regina-Saskatoon directory. Sure there have been some intrusions but not a large number. Don't get me wrong — I am not inferring there was anything wrong with the individuals involved. In fact I have been impressed with the quality of leadership we have had over the past 20 years, but the point is that this society still has a major portion of its membership based in rural Saskatchewan. I do not think it is right or proper that when hiring an office manager, which was apparently only being advertised to

SNHS members and their friends (through *Blue Jay*), that only Regina or Saskatoon be considered just because it is the current executive's own back yard. Let's have a Saskatchewan natural history society. I am sure that there are equally qualified and willing people living outside of Saskatoon or Regina who are capable of running our society both as elected officers and in hired positions. — *Wayne C. Harris*, Box 414, Raymore, Saskatchewan. S0A 3J0

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Members' commentary on controversial issues of any kind are welcome. Don't save it all for the annual meeting, start the action any time!

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## 37th ANNUAL MEETING

Saskatchewan Natural History Society

**October 18-19-20, 1985**

**Landmark Inn, 4150 Albert Street S.  
Regina, Saskatchewan**

### October 18:

- 7:00 pm Registration
- 8:00 pm Conservation highlights
- 9:00 pm Members slides

### October 19:

- 7:15 am Bird Hike
- 9:00 am Business meeting
- 7:00 pm Banquet  
Speaker Brian Schantz of  
Ellis Bird Farm, Alberta

### October 20:

- 9:30 am Last Mountain Lake  
tour for birds







